

The Despoliation of Egypt

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The Despoliation of Egypt

in Pre-Rabbinic, Rabbinic and
Patristic Traditions

by

Joel Stevens Allen



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I dedicate this work to my beloved wife Kitty whose self-sacrificial and unstinting support throughout the nine years of doctoral studies has made it possible. I also dedicate the work to Drs. Adam Kamesar and Richard Sarason, both of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Their constant encouragement and penetrating critique both motivated me for the work and perfected me in it. I am grateful also to the library staff at Union College in Barbourville, Kentucky who cheerfully tracked down and procured hundreds of obscure texts from around the world. I would also like to thank my two daughters, Johanna and Emma, who have more than once had to put their daddytime on hold for the completion of this project. I love you both!

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INTRODUCTION:
THE DESPOLIATION OF EGYPT IN PRE-RABBINIC,
RABBINIC AND PATRISTIC TRADITIONS

It is probably safe to say that the interpretation of the Bible is as old as the Bible itself, as is evidenced by the fact that later biblical books are known not only to allude back to earlier books, but to modify, sometimes completely, the original sense of earlier texts.¹ Yet, after the biblical period, the interpreters of scripture began to play a central role in Israel, and the accumulated body of this interpretive lore came to be known widely even in the diaspora. These biblical interpretations appear in many books which were composed roughly from the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., yet were not accepted in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. These texts allow us to reconstruct in some detail how the Bible was read and understood in this crucial period.

The process of interpretation of ancient texts was not merely an exercise in investigating antiquity; these scriptures were always interpreted with a view to their relevance to application to daily life, and to the issues with which faced their contemporaries. Kugel identifies four basic assumptions which, in spite of the wide variety of styles and genres and even interpretive methods, underlie all traditional biblical interpretation. The first assumption was that the Bible is fundamentally a cryptic document. All interpreters maintain that, although the scripture may appear to say X, what it really means is Y. The second assumption is that the Scriptures are fundamentally relevant to contemporary life and its challenges. The third assumption is that the Scriptures are perfect and perfectly harmonious. While there might appear to be discrepancies in the Bible, these apparent variances are latent with deeper meaning, and are not mistakes but opportunities for the interpreter to search for the deeper substance of the text. Because there is perfect harmony among all parts of the Bible, any biblical text can be used to illustrate another. In its extreme form, the doctrine of 'omnisignificance' claims that nothing is said in vain or even for rhetorical flourish. Every

¹ For a seminal study of inner-biblical interpretation, see M. Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

detail of scripture is an opportunity to interpret; that is, to search for a deeper meaning. The fourth assumption is that all scripture is of divine provenance, or divinely inspired.²

Interpreters of the scriptures are sometimes thought of as being completely cavalier in attitude, altering meanings willy-nilly to fit their whims and fancies, or more commonly, their theological/political agendas. This, however, is not correct. While all of their interpretations reflect their beliefs and ideas; at times, their primary concern is simply to explain what they have encountered in the text which may be either difficult to understand or having some unacceptable contradiction or moral problem. But their interpretations typically start with the text itself, which has been examined in its every detail in search of hidden meanings. The meanings they found are, of course, relative to the writer and to his communities, either a timeless moral truth or a law to be observed, or a prediction of the future. But these interpretations typically flowed directly from something seen in the text; an apparent contradiction, an unnecessary detail, a repetition or an emphatic turn of phrase was seen by the exegete as an opportunity to explore the text to discover its real meaning. But very often, the primary motivation appears to be making sense out of the biblical text—but making sense out of all of it, even its seemingly insignificant details, its confusing features, its troubling passages. For it was often these very things that were invitations for the exegetes to work their magic.³

In the case of the themes to be investigated here, reflection on the meaning of the text was initiated by a particularly troubling moral feature found in the story of the exodus; the despoliation of the Egyptians. This study will examine the pre-rabbinic, rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the texts that describe the plundering of the Egyptians: the *spoliatio* motif in Gen 15:14; Exod 3:21–22; 11:2–3 and 12:35–36. Few passages have evoked such embarrassment, both to Jewish and Christian expositors as this one. Vigorous and various apologies for this passage began in the Hellenistic era, and continue to the present time. Since the attacks on Israel's behavior necessarily involved an attack on the Hebrew Bible itself, and upon the God it claims to reveal, Jews and Christians have often found themselves backed into the same corner,

² J. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17–23.

³ Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 23–6.

and arguing along similar lines against Gnostics and others perceived as heretics.⁴

At issue are the questions of whether or not Israel was guilty of fraud and deception in taking the treasures from Egypt, and of whether or not God was responsible for the fraudulent act as its sponsor and director. These texts together give the impression that, with Israel as willing accomplices and beneficiaries, God orchestrated both deception and despoliation of the Egyptians. It is promised to Abraham that although his descendents would become aliens/foreigners, ill-treated in a foreign land, God would surely judge their oppressors; “and afterward they will come out with many possessions” (Gen 15:14). When, at the burning bush, Moses is commanded to return to Egypt, he is ordered to beseech Pharaoh for a few days off work to offer sacrifice in the desert (Exod 3:18), even though the intended goal was departure and deliverance (3:8–10). God then promised to bring Israel forth from Egypt with such goodwill in the eyes of the Egyptians that the Egyptians would hand over, when asked, their gold, silver or clothing (3:21–22). Thus, it is promised that they would plunder Egypt.

While the first texts concern God’s promise of coming plunder, in the second God notifies Moses that the proper time of plundering had arrived; just before the final climactic plague (Exod 11:1–2). In the third text (Exod 12:35–36) we learn that Moses’ commands have indeed been carried out. God was true to his promise. The Egyptians gave their valuables when and as asked. The story concludes, “and so, they plundered Egypt” (v. 36).

The problem begins with the verb translated ‘ask’ (*šā’al* is used in each of the three texts mentioned). This is also the normal word for ‘borrow’ and borrowing seems the more likely meaning in this context. Why would the Egyptians give their valuables to Hebrews whom they knew were leaving for good? Since Moses had only asked for some time off work, the Egyptians expected the Hebrews to return to Egypt. Also, the timing of the reminder (Exod 11:2) appears designed for deception, since the items were to be requested before the last plague, that is, before it became clear that the Israelites were leaving for good.⁵ Thus, the reader must conclude that the Egyptians, by divine compulsion, loaned the Hebrews gold, silver and clothing which they expected to receive

⁴ B. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 175.

⁵ Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 323.

back when the Israelites returned from their worship in the wilderness. The Hebrews were willing accomplices to both the deception and the despoliation by keeping their intention to flee Egypt secret and by asking for and taking treasures they knew they would never give back. It is particularly damning that Exod 12:36, in describing what has occurred, avers that the Hebrews plundered the Egyptians. If these treasures were understood by the Egyptians as gifts, given free and clear, the children of Israel did not plunder Egypt. The claim that the event, whatever else it may have been, was a plundering of Egypt, necessitates that we read the verb as 'to borrow.'

To introduce this topic further, three issues will be explored briefly. First, we will examine the interpretive context into which our verses fall. Does the biblical text itself intend to be understood as revelry in deception, or are other interpretations possible? The focus of concern will be solely on the canonical form of the text. Second, we will lay out the goals and methods that will guide our study. Lastly, we will survey the pre-rabbinic, rabbinic and patristic texts to be examined in the course of this study.

THE INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT

Exodus, both as historical narrative and as sacred text, plays a central role in Jewish and Christian consciousness, for by it these faith communities are told the story of their deliverance from oppression, and their calling to become the people of God. In its final form, it is part of the larger story beginning with the Patriarchs. While the genealogical connection between the Exodus community and the Patriarchs is not at all clear historically or archaeologically, from a literary perspective the continuity between the two is beyond doubt. Not only is the continuity one of genealogy, it involves divine promise and fulfillment. The exodus narrative as a whole displays God's fidelity to the promises made to Abram and reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob. This promise included the provision of land, descendants, and blessing for all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1–3).

The first hint of the upcoming despoliation appears when God reaffirms his covenant with Abram in Gen 15:13–14.

¹³And He said to Abram, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved (ועבדום) and oppressed

four hundred years; ¹⁴ but I will execute judgment (דָּן אֶנְכִי) on the nation they shall serve (עֲבָדוּ), and in the end they shall go free with great wealth (בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל NJPS).

God had reaffirmed to Abram here the promise that he would provide his people with a land of their own (v. 7), and asked for sacrifices in response to Abram's plea for confirmation. Abram prepared the sacrifices and was put into a deep sleep accompanied by a great dark dread (vv. 8–12). It was in this condition that God had made the above warning and promise.

Thus the despoliation of Exod 12:35–36 fits the broader background of promise and fulfillment between Genesis and Exodus generally, and is specifically the fulfillment of the 'great wealth' promised to Abram in Gen 15:14. The despoliation in this case appears to be part of God's divine judgment against Israel's future oppressors; "I will execute judgment on the nation they shall *serve*" (v. 14). The verb עָבַד plays a predominant role in this sequence, as we see in verse 13, "They will *serve* them" and in verse 14, "and that people whom they *serve*, I will judge." Since this verb also plays a leading role in the exodus narrative itself, the careful reader can hardly but make the association. By considering the usage of the verb in the exodus narratives and its emphatic repetition here, we tease out an interpretive nuance.

In Exod 1:13–14 these radicals appear twice in the verbal form and three times in the nominal form.

¹³ The Egyptians forced the Israelites to *labor* ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with difficult *work* at mortar and bricks and with all kinds of *labor* in the field; all their *labors* which they agonizingly performed (עֲבָדוּ) for them.

The syntax of this passage is notoriously difficult, and its logic leaves one with questions.⁶ Yet it clearly seeks to underline the severity and unjustness of the labors which the Hebrew slaves were forced to perform. The repetition of עָבַד sets the stage for the contest between God and Pharaoh: who has the right to Israel's service? In 3:12, the *service* (here, in terms of worship) Israel renders Yahweh on the mountain upon their exit from Egypt is the sign to Moses that indeed it was God who sent him and delivered them. While Moses was on his way back

⁶ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 15–16.

from Midian, the LORD instructed him to speak to Pharaoh to demand deliverance for Israel, God's firstborn son, 'that he might *worship* me' (4:23 וַיַּעֲבֹדַי). The word does not appear in Moses' first confrontation with Pharaoh (5:1—חַגֵּג is used). But Pharaoh continues to insist that the Hebrews render their *service* to him (5:18). In 6:5, God hears the moaning of the Israelites due to the severity of the *service* required by the Egyptians.

Beginning in chapter 7, both when the Lord commands Moses to confront Pharaoh in 7:16 and when Moses does indeed confront Pharaoh in 7:26, every instance in which Moses uses the phrase, "Let my people go" (8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3), it is followed by the telic clause וַיַּעֲבֹדַי which is, "that they may serve me." Here the service rendered, in light of the sacrificial festivals mentioned in 5:1, is clearly 'worship.' In 10:7, Pharaoh's courtiers urge him to let the people go 'to *worship* the Lord their God.' Pharaoh at this point begins to negotiate just who and what will be allowed to go *worship* the Lord, a conversation which heavily features the word עֶבֶד (vv. 8, 11, 24, 26).

The centrality of the term in the narrative could hardly be clearer on a literary level, and the duality of meaning between *service/slavery* and *divine worship* plays a key role. Pharaoh demands that the Hebrews render him their slavish service for his greedy purposes while Yahweh has true claim and ownership of their service/worship. These data become important as we interpret the tension between the service/slavery rendered to their oppressors and the judgment to be brought upon those oppressors for their unrighteousness (Gen 15:13–14). Gen 15:13–14 implies that the great wealth which God distributed to the Hebrews was divine judgment on the Egyptians not just for the excessive severity of service which they forced upon the Hebrews but for their robbery of God himself. By demanding their service/slavery for himself, Pharaoh was stealing the service/worship that rightfully belonged to Yahweh. What God primarily wanted from the Hebrews was their service/worship, the very thing that Pharaoh unjustly stole away from God by forcing his service/slavery upon them. The despoliation was thus justified as not only the divine judgment of Yahweh upon those who unjustly oppressed Yahweh's people, but also as the reordering of justice in the divine realm. On the narrative level, Pharaoh had stolen the divine service of Yahweh's people and transformed it into slavish labor. God had the right to retrieve what was truly his, and so to restore the harm done.

Two other contextual themes provide interpretive perspective as we consider the despoliation. Firstly, creation as the cosmic context for

Exodus as has recently been emphasized in studies of Exodus.⁷ The work of God achieved in the redemption of the Hebrew slaves can be read as part of the larger story of creation, and the initial purposes of the creator. The mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), which is as much promise as imperative, finds fulfillment in Exod 1:7, when we read of the multiplication of Hebrew children in Egypt. Pharaoh's order to kill all Hebrew male babies, which follows next in the narrative, involves resistance to the very purposes of God in creation. Pharaoh represents not only a historical power but the very forces of chaos which oppose God's work in creation. This cosmic element of story comes to greatest clarity in the Song of the Sea, especially in the involvement of the elements of creation in the victory over Egypt (Exod 15:1–18, esp. vs. 8–12).

Thus, God's deliverance of Israel is not an end in itself, but that which restores and reorders creation and bears witness to the sovereignty of the Creator.⁸ Reading the Exodus as a reestablishment of the Creator's rightful reign over the cosmos colors the despoliation. We are dealing here, not with the plundering of the unsuspecting innocent Egyptians, but with the restoration of divine order. Restoration of the freedom of the Hebrews would not have alone sufficed, for their years of slavery was a chaotic resistance to the divine will. Some form of remuneration was necessary for the divine plan to eventuate a just restoration, and for the right ordering of God's universe to be achieved.

The final contextual theme which unlocks the internal logic of the story as it relates to the despoliation, and perhaps the most important, concerns the revelation of the nature and identity of Israel's God. A central feature of the exodus narrative is the clarification of Yahweh's nature and character, in contradistinction to the gods of Egypt. The question of the character and nature of God becomes particularly manifest in Pharaoh's proud question, "Who is Yahweh?" (Exod 5:2). The story from that point develops so as to answer that question, and to make the LORD known, not only to the Hebrews (6:3, 7; 10:2) but to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (7:5; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18) and eventually to all the peoples of the earth (15:14–15; 18:8–12). As

⁷ T. Fretheim, *Exodus* (IBC: Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 108. See also Fretheim "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *JBL* 110 (1991): 385–96; and B. Birch, W. Brueggemann, Fretheim, and D. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 107–108. D. Gowan critiques this view (*Theology of Exodus* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994], 140).

⁸ Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction*, 107–8.

we saw in Gen 15:14, the plagues against Egypt are judgment for the way the Egyptians treated the Hebrews and for their stealing divine service from Yahweh himself. But Exodus does not strongly emphasize the plagues as punishment for Pharaoh's sins. Words for sin are strangely missing from Exodus 1–15 (only 9:27 and 10:16ff, used by Pharaoh himself, not in judgment against him).⁹

God's purpose for the plagues is most clearly identified in 9:14–16 in words to be spoken to Pharaoh himself.

¹⁴ For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that (בְּעִבּוֹר) you may know that there is none like Me in all the world. ¹⁵I could have stretched forth my hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth.¹⁰ ¹⁶Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose (בְּעִבּוֹר twice): in order (לְמַעַן) to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world (NJPS).

The triple use of what is already a strong purpose word heightens the rhetorical force of the passage in the narrative flow. The point of all the suffering and pestilence brought by God upon Egypt is identified in three positive statements: “that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth,” “to show you my power,” and “so that my fame may resound throughout the world.” God is in a showdown with Pharaoh over who is most powerful in the world. By displaying his power, God will prove that there is none like himself in the whole world, and this will be made known throughout the whole world.

Gowan points out that the use of the word ‘know’ (יָדַע) is associated with the words ‘wonders’ (מוֹפֵת) and ‘signs’ (אוֹת). Wonders are mighty and awe-inspiring acts or miracles. Signs are events that are intended to convey information of some kind about God.¹¹ In Exod 10:1ff the nexus of ‘signs’ and ‘knowing’ results from the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of his servants are hardened to provide opportunity for God to provide signs in Egypt so that the knowledge of God may become unavoidable to their land. Pharaoh is the learner in 9:14 and Israel in 10:2. All of this is precipitated by

⁹ The situation is slightly more complex than explained here. See Gowan, *Theology of Exodus*, 133.

¹⁰ There is no basis in the text for the conditional rendering, “I could have...” (see also RSV, NIV and NEB). The LXX translates נָכַח with the future indicative.

¹¹ πατάξω see *TDOT* 1:167–88.

Israel's sufferings in Egypt at the start (3:7), but beginning with chapter six, the sufferings of Israel fall into the background. The purpose of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the resulting plagues ceases to be judgment and increasingly becomes the spread of the knowledge and glory of God.¹²

The destruction of the Egyptian army at the sea is explicitly tied to this purpose in Exod 14:4, 17. In chs. 5–15, the words for oppression and suffering do not occur at all, yet the verb 'know,' with either the Egyptians or Israel as the subject, is the thread that holds the whole account together. Gowan says,

When Moses and Aaron first encounter the pharaoh with their request that the Hebrews be permitted to go into the wilderness to sacrifice, the king's scornful answer is, "Who is Yahweh, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? *I do not know Yahweh*, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2). The rest of the story, through 14:18, tells how God remedied that deficiency.¹³

The signs are thus intended to be revelation to both Israel and Egypt. This knowledge is more than intellectual apprehension of a fact, but includes adoration and orientation toward the one who makes the claim.¹⁴ Thus Israel understood the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the resulting plagues of its Exodus as a show of power and sovereignty to provide an unavoidable opportunity for Egypt to know Yahweh as the true God worthy of worship.

The despoliation, in this interpretive context, takes on new shades of meaning that move toward justification. The purpose of all the tragedies experience by Egypt was not to deliver Israel in such a way as to humiliate the Egyptians. God's purpose was to make his name and identity known, not only to Israel but in Egypt and the rest of the world. This can only be accomplished with acts which make God's absolute sovereignty unavoidable. From the vantage point of the biblical writer, this is their salvation. Complete and overwhelming victory was necessary to humble Pharaoh and his proud nation to confess Yahweh as God. The plundering of Egypt is the final evidence of the utter defeat of the Egyptians. As Childs has it, "The Israelites do not slink out of the country, but go as a victorious army who has plundered

¹² Gowan, *Theology of Exodus*, 134.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 137.

their oppressors.”¹⁵ As the victorious army left with Egyptian goods, the Egyptians could do nothing but conclude that Yahweh was God, their deities were not.¹⁶

METHODS AND GOALS

The methods of this work have been shaped by the work of others, particularly S. Fraade’s study *Enosh and His Generation*.¹⁷ Fraade examines the history of the interpretation of Gen. 4:26. He focuses on how the classical Jewish, Samaritan and Christian exegetes understood this verse. In Chapter One, Fraade examines the pre-rabbinic Jewish interpretations; including the Jewish Greek Scriptures, Ben Sira, *Jubilees*, 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch*, Philo, and Josephus. Chapter Two treats Samaritan and Mandaean interpretations. Chapter Three, the Christian interpretations: Greek, Latin and Syriac. Chapter Four explores the rabbinic sources: targumic, tannaitic, amoraic, postamoraic and *Piyyuṭ*. Finally he examines rabbinic method and motivations.

Like Fraade, the method to be followed here is historical and philological. All texts will be read carefully, and considered within their literary and cultural contexts. The texts will be seen in light of previous interpretations in order to determine how the themes were shaped and advanced. Through this *history of exegesis* approach, this dissertation will seek to carry out and develop the initial lines laid down by J. Kugel in the few pages he devoted to the problem (see footnote 2).

Fraade sets out three main goals, each of which will be replicated here. Exegesis comes to life in the tension that perpetually exists between the biblical text and the cultural context to which the interpreter speaks. The conviction that the Word of God is powerfully relevant for the community of faith drives the exegete forward into new territory of application, but the good exegete constantly remains aware of the need to stay rooted in the biblical text for warrant. The first goal of our study is to determine in each case how this balancing act was executed.

¹⁵ *The Book of Exodus*, 201.

¹⁶ I have called this motif below ‘severe mercy,’ a phrase which might not be how the author of Exodus would express himself. To a certain degree, the phrase “severe mercy” may reflect modern theological understandings. It is, even so, an interpretive solution that has heuristic value.

¹⁷ S. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation* (Chico, California: Scholar’s Press, 1984), 1–4.

However, into the fixed text and changing circumstance flows another current: inherited traditions of exegesis which sometimes had an authority rivaling that of the biblical text itself. These often functioned as a mediator between tradition and contextual application, and thus, the interpreted traditions had to be relatively fixed yet somewhat flexible. As our second goal, we will seek to determine how new exegeses were grounded in and shaped the inherited traditions of interpretation.

The task of comparison, goal three, completes the process: to identify what is common and what is distinctive.¹⁸ As is often noted by scholars, the Rabbis and Fathers interpret sacred writ so as to reveal both their own concerns and the theological needs of their respective communities. Their interpretations also reveal familiarity with, and interest in, each other. This familiarity reflects the close but contentious contact that existed between the early Christian and Jewish communities. No longer can one hold with A. Harnack that the anti-Jewish polemic in Christian writings represented a literary genre only, but not personal contact. Many studies have sought to define the manner and extent to which Christians learned the Hebrew Scriptures and interpretive traditions from the Rabbis.¹⁹ Some have even sought to show influence in the other direction.²⁰

But as noted by J. Baskin, the importance of these rabbinic-patristic parallels should not be exaggerated. Jewish borrowings did not play an important role in Christian exegesis because they were not central to the Christian commentator's major concerns.²¹ While there is evidence of a considerable amount of sharing of interpretive material, the general posture remains decidedly and rather consistently hostile. However, these *spoliatio* texts play an important role in the Gnostic libel against the Jewish/Christian God. Here we encounter Christians and Jews with the same concerns, arguing the same ideas with the same antagonists since the Gnostics painted Jews and Christians into the same corner.

¹⁸ Fraade, *Enosh*, 2. In some cases I will focus question 3 on asking how the uniqueness of the exegesis applies to the writers historic situation.

¹⁹ W. Horbury, *Christians and Jews in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); N.R.M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); and R.L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²⁰ E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," *Studia Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 247–275; and R. Kimmelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third Century Jewish-Christian Disputation," *HTR* 73 (1980): 567–595.

²¹ J. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors* (Chico: California: Scholar's Press, 1983), 119.

The *Spoliatio*, for the Gnostics, was proof of the inferior nature of the Jewish/Christian God. While assured results cannot be claimed before the completion of research, it is possible that in this instance we will uncover an intersection between Jewish and Christian approaches that is more substantive than arises typically. Thus, this work may unlock new insights about Jewish/Christian contacts and relationships in this formative period, before Jewish/Christian antagonism had hardened into a deadlock.

Some detailed work has been done on this topic already. P. Beatrice has also outlined and analyzed the earlier interpretive traditions in order to place the contribution of Augustine in its hermeneutical context.²² L. Frizzell's recent study, "'Spoils from Egypt,' Between Jews and Gnostics," examines the patristic interpretive traditions.²³ Childs has also written a helpful excursus on the despoliation, and describes traditional attempts to justify God's actions, but only provides a thumbnail sketch.²⁴ J. Kugel has several pages on the topic, and as has been noted above, provides illuminating insights. More recently, two studies have come forth. G. Folliet has isolated and briefly summarized most of the interpretive references to the *spoliatio* in Christian interpretation.²⁵ Yet the goals of his work are broad, and he only covers a narrow representative sample of texts. For instance, Kugel only examines one rabbinic text (*Megillat Ta'anit*), while there are perhaps 30 or more which could be considered.

PRE-RABBINIC JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

Jubilees interprets despoliation in terms of back-payment for lost wages. Concerning the versions, the Septuagint and Targums (while not pre-rabbinic) lead the way in importance. Wisdom 10:17 and Ezekiel the Tragedian vv. 165–166 also interpret in terms of just compensation for unpaid labor. Artapanus (*Eusebius Preparation for the Gospel* 9.27.19, 34–35) briefly mentions the plundering but essentially tries to pin the

²² P. Beatrice, "The Treasures of the Egyptians. A Chapter in the History of Patristic Exegesis and Late Antique Culture," *Studia Patristica* 39 (2007): 159–183.

²³ L. Frizzell, "'Spoils from Egypt' Between Jews and Gnostics," *Hellenization Revisited* (ed. Wendy Helleman, Chico, California: University Press of America, 1994), 383–4.

²⁴ *The Book of Exodus*, 175.

²⁵ G. Folliet, "La Spoliatio Aegyptiorum (Exode 3:21–23; 11:2–3; 12:35–36) Les Interprétations de cette Image chez les Pères et Autres Écrivains Ecclésiastiques," *Traditio* 57 (2002): 1–48.

blame for it on the Arabians.²⁶ Philo (*Moses* 1.25) seeks to exonerate God on two fronts simultaneously. The plundered treasures are wages for unpaid labor, and a justifiable counter-measure for greater harms received. Philo also allegorizes LXX Gen 15:14 as referring to the viaticum provided by encyclical education which was necessary to sustain the soul as it makes its journey to God (*Who is the Heir* 271–74). Josephus provides little more than a sentence (*Antiquities* 2.14), but in so doing he calls the despoliation gifts given in honor and friendship.

RABBINIC LITERATURE

There are three general methods by which the Rabbis treat the problem of the plunder. First, some texts embrace the moral problem reveling in the joys of deception, with all its moral duplicity. Second, some texts minimize the extent of the moral problem. There are various means to accomplish this; some employ the “back wages as unpaid labor” argument, and some the ‘bon voyage gifts’ theory (as did Josephus). Others argue that these were the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Gen. 15:14. Some, like Philo, describe the act as justifiable vengeance. Third, some texts seek to make virtue out of vice. Rather than try to justify the behavior specifically, they re-read the story with an eye to expanding upon any available virtue, and thus read virtue into the passage and vice out of it. These can be divided into three sub-categories; 1) texts that emphasize the ability of the Hebrew people to keep a secret, 2) texts that emphasize the ability of the Hebrew people to order their priorities rightly, 3) texts that highlight the positive outcomes of the plundering, such as the destruction of Egyptian idols.

PATRISTIC LITERATURE

Patristic texts treat the moral problem with many of the arguments already mentioned. Many of these texts remain decidedly non-allegorical: Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.30) and Clement of Alexandria

²⁶ Abbreviations of citations of classical, pre-Rabbinic and patristic literature follow the guidelines of *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Grand Rapids, Hendrickson, 1999) 68–152 and 237–263. As a general principle, on first occasion, I will cite the title of work completely in English if this is provided by the *SBL Handbook*. Thereafter I provide the title following the English abbreviation. If the English title or abbreviation is not provided, I follow the Greek or Latin.

(*Miscellanies* 1:157,2). Tertullian's interpretation (*Against Marcion* 2.20) is an interesting case. He quite possibly takes the arguments of the Rabbis (*GenR* 61:7 or *B. Sanh* 91a), and by applying Roman forensic principles concerning the legitimate procurement of slaves, develops the value of the argument considerably. This is one instance where we may encounter a substantive sharing of interpretive perspective.²⁷

Another solution that also may depend upon substantive borrowing from the Rabbis emerges in Origen's *Letter to Gregory*. He, with what may be an haggadic tradition, claims that the treasures plundered were the very ones used to construct the wilderness tabernacle. Thus, the things taken, which were misused by the Egyptians, were put to their proper use by the children of Israel in their worship of the true God. He combines this 'ends justify the means' approach with a 'fair back-wages' justification to provide legitimization on two fronts. Augustine, in *Christian Instruction* 2.40, follows a similar tack. In both cases, justification for God is sought through literal, or at least, non-allegorical interpretation.

While Origen solves the moral problem in the biblical text on the literal/haggadic level, his primary interest in the passage is with the allegorical interpretation he applies to it—one that sheds light on the thorny question of the appropriate Christian attitude toward pagan literature and knowledge. Origen writes this letter to instruct his pupil Gregory in this question. He asserts that the Scriptures here hint (ἀνίσσασθαι) that the Christian ought to read and appropriate all that is good in pagan philosophy, for in doing so he is plundering the riches of Egypt. This posture affirmed for the Christian the value of the Greek intellectual tradition—and of Greek philosophy in particular—and thus provided later theologians with rationale for intellectual openness. Thus, interest in the interpretation history of this verse is relevant to another important question: How did biblical exegesis play a role in the developing relationship between Christians and their pagan cultural environs?

This allegorical tradition cast a long and influential shadow. When Christians later justified their interest in, and application of, non-Christian philosophy, it was the image of plundering the Egyptians which typically sprang to mind. Augustine broadcast the interpretation

²⁷ J. Petuchowski, "Halakhah in the Church Fathers," *Essays in Honor of Solomon B. Freehof*, ed. W. Jacob *et al.* (Pittsburgh, 1964), 264–268.

to the Latin Church (*Eighty-Three Different Questions; Christian Instruction* 2.40 and *Confessions* 7.9). Commentary on the text appears in Epiphanius, Eusebius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa in the Greek tradition, and in Ambrose in the Latin.

The importance of this allegory for Christian theology can hardly be overstated. L. Frizzell has pointed out that three Christian postures toward pagan culture were: (1) overt rejection, (2) classics as a parallel authority, and (3) *praeformatio evangelica* or *spoliatio*.²⁸ Key voices in the Church called for this third 'liberal' posture which recognizes that wisdom and goodness can be perceived in each culture, all of which can be drawn upon as preparation for the gospel. Through an appropriation of Origen's allegory, Augustine claimed much of the culture and learning of the classical era for the Church as the biblically mandated despoliation of the Egyptians. While the Christian attitude toward pagan learning remained complex, this image echoes "through the ages and provided a handy justification for those who wished to have the best of both worlds."²⁹ This allegorical tradition encouraged Christians to value all learning and to put these treasures to the service of Christ and the Church. By examining the history of this allegorical interpretation, this study will move beyond the Church/Synagogue relationship to unlock something of the Christian/pagan dynamic.

The study will conclude with an overview of that which has been learned of the relationship of Jews with Christians, and Christians with pagans. Does the tradition have present meaning and value in the church? Paul Griffith's paper "Seeking Egyptian Gold: A Fundamental Metaphor for the Christian Intellectual Life in a Religiously Diverse Age," provides excellent guidance here.³⁰ For Christians who are unwilling to accept the theological pluralism and syncretism of the age, yet who desire to remain in dialogue with other faiths, this metaphor may yet have something to say.

²⁸ Frizzell, "Spoils from Egypt," 383–4.

²⁹ L. Renolds and N. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 35.

³⁰ Paul Griffith, "Seeking Egyptian Gold: A Fundamental Metaphor for the Christian Intellectual Life in a Religiously Diverse Age," *The Cresset* 63/7 (2000): 5–16.

PART ONE

PRE-RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS

THE SEPTUAGINT

A very brief overview of the historical backdrop for the translation of the Pentateuch, and the quality of the translation of the Pentateuch will serve as a starting point. In spite of vague claims otherwise, it is improbable that any Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible came into existence before Alexander the Great. No fragments of these translations have been produced, and it is likely that the claims that the Hebrew scriptures (at least the Pentateuch) had been translated earlier were fashioned by the Hellenized Jews in order to claim that the best thoughts of the Classical Era had biblical origins.¹ The need for translation into Greek arose with the dispersion of Jews into the Greek-speaking world with the conquests of Alexander the Great. Josephus claims that the Jewish community in Alexandria was the work of Alexander himself, who gave them permission to settle there with the promise of equal rights in exchange for the promise of loyalty (*J.W.* 2.487; *Ag. Ap.* 2.35). Alexander's favorable policy toward the Jews has long been debated.² Josephus' report has not yet been successfully substantiated or refuted.³ It is possible that his citation of Hecataeus, that "after the death of Alexander not a few Jews migrated of their own free will to Egypt on account of the unrest in Syria" has validity (*Ag. Ap.* 1.186).⁴ Even so, the origins of the Jewish diaspora in Alexandria can be better dated to the period of Ptolemy I (323–283 B.C.E.), who, according to *The Letter of Aristeas* (12–14), brought 100,000 Jewish captives to Egypt after he conquered Jerusalem.⁵ It is possible that these two claims are both correct; slaves brought to Egypt could have been the Jews who

¹ H. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 2.

² Swete mentions the disagreement but finds no reason to doubt Josephus seeing no direct evidence contradicts it (*Ibid.*, 5). V. Tcherikover doubts Josephus' testimony as purely apologetic formed without historical sources (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* [trans. S. Applebaum, New York: Atheneum, 1985], 272).

³ F. Millar and Emil Schürer *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 3.1.43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ Tcherikover, V., *Hellenistic Civilization*, 273. Jews had lived in Egypt long before the Ptolemaic period (see Tcherikover 269–272).

supported Seleucid control, and Ptolemy's deportation of those who aided his enemy is not surprising, nor is it surprising that he would have encouraged his supporters to join groups of Jews who had earlier settled in Egypt.⁶

Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 B.C.E.), upon his ascension to the throne, purchased the Jews from their owners and set them free. *Let. Aris.* (22–24) validates this claim with a copy of the royal order, a document previously considered a forgery, but now widely accepted. The order indicates the increasing influence of Egyptian Jewry in Alexandria, and the warm relations between them and the royal court.⁷ The Jews of Alexandria lived, in the period of the Diadochi, in their own allotted quarter, separate from the rest of the city. Josephus claims that Alexander gave them this sector of the city so that they could live in isolation, without being polluted by the Gentiles (*J.W.* 2.487–488). However, Philo speaks of Jewish houses of prayer spread throughout the whole city (*Allegorical Interpretation* 132) and that while Jews could be found in all parts of the city, they were primarily centered in two of the five districts of the city (*Against Flaccus* 55). The main Jewish quarter, even in Philo's day was in the north-eastern part of the city along a harborless shore in the Delta area.⁸

The warm relationship between the Alexandrian Jews and the court, in the time of Philometor, blossomed further when he gave them permission for the Jews to build their own temple at Leantopolis. It operated as a replica of the Jerusalem temple until the Roman period, yet was only of local significance.⁹ Even with their local temple, the Jewish community of Alexandria, for the most part, remained loyal to their heritage and made regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the great festivals. They also collected the temple tax for the Jerusalem temple. Yet, as necessity would have it, the Alexandrian Jewry increased their understanding of Greek and lessened their abilities with their mother language. The language into which their scriptures were translated was the Greek they spoke and in which they worshipped, κοινή. In all probability, the needs of the worshipping community necessitated the translation.

⁶ L. Greenspoon, in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Ed. M.D. Coogan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 426.

⁷ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 274.

⁸ F. Millar and Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1.43–44.

⁹ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 280.

Since there exists a document which purports to be an account bearing direct witness to this translation process (*Let. Aris.*), one would imagine that we have a rich resource of information on its early history. However, scholars today believe this letter was not written at the time it claims, but sometime in the second century B.C.E., to defend both Judaism and the Greek version itself.¹⁰ *Let. Aris.* claims to deal *only* with the translation of the Pentateuch, and places its translation in the period of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.E.), a claim broadly accepted. The translation is correctly associated with the Jewish community of Alexandria, but rather than having been translated for the famous Alexandria library, as *Let. Aris.* claims (30ff), many scholars believe that it was translated primarily for use within the synagogue. The Greek of the Pentateuchal portion does not appear to be the work of Palestinian Jews, as *Let. Aris.* claims (32). Comparisons between the language of the LXX and that of the papyri of that time reveal in a definitive fashion that the work was that of Alexandrian Jews, using language as it was spoken in the Jewish colony of the Delta under the rule of the Ptolemies.¹¹

The Septuagint was a pioneering work in many ways, and the translators were attempting a project for which there were few standards to guide them. Greek society preferred independently rewritten accounts rather than direct translations.¹² Both the Babylonian priest Berosus and the Egyptian high priest Manetho were completing histories of their respective peoples at approximately the same period. Yet the translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek in the 3rd century B.C.E. was an event without precedent in the ancient world, and is thus of extreme importance for the history of civilization.¹³

While some scholars have impugned the translation as a theological commentary, the verdict of Swete has been confirmed by modern study. The Septuagint as a whole is a translation that aims at integrity.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ K. Jobes and M. Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2000), 34.

¹¹ Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 21.

¹² C. Rabin, "The Translation Process and the Character of the Septuagint," *Textus* 6 (1968): 19.

¹³ N. Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: An Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*. Trans. W. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 18. Also S. Brock, "The Phenomenon of Biblical Translation in Antiquity" in *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recensions, and Interpretations* (ed. S. Jellicoe, New York: Ktav, 1974), 541–71.

¹⁴ S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 317. Marcos, *Septuagint*, 23.

relative frequency in it of the translations of perplexity or embarrassment, that is, the word-for-word or transliterated rendering of things not completely understood (some still perplexing) illustrates a reluctance to speculate about the meaning of the Hebrew text. The LXX translators, since they lacked any Greek or Jewish model for their project, may have drawn from the oral translation practices of the commercial and court dragoman (ἑρμηνεύς) which they, as middle-class inhabitants of such a large port-city, would have encountered. Translating literally, even if the words make little sense, is the method of the commercial translator, who counts on his reader being better acquainted with the circumstances than himself.¹⁵

This model also sheds light on the rather functional Greek into which they translated (we find very few attempts to demonstrate refined Greek style). The ἑρμηνεύς model also provides a ready explanation for the most disturbing of all LXX features, the Semitisms of its syntax. A commercial translator was trained to translate word for word and phrase for phrase, with ready-made renderings for specific grammatical constructions.¹⁶

However, the Septuagint is not a pure exponent of either the literal or the free method of translation. It consists of a series of compromises, in which different proportions of the literal and the free are found. While the original translators were not literalists in any ideological sense, they were probably not sophisticated interpreters either, but practical linguists who used primitive word-lists if the same equivalence was used again and again for a single word of the original. Later, the ideological movement towards literalism pushed for greater accuracy based on the conception of the inspired nature of scripture with multiple layers of meaning. These layers of meaning could only be captured with the strictest literalist translation. But when the Pentateuch was translated, the literal method was simply a practical way of solving problems.¹⁷

Because the LXX translators must always be considered as individuals, book by book, we now consider the quality of the translation of Exodus specifically. The presuppositions which guided Wevers' work on the text of Exodus, and which were confirmed by his study of it,

¹⁵ Rabin, "Translation," 19–26.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷ J. Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations* (Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 324.

will guide our study as well. First, since the translators saw their task as a holy one, they sought to take it seriously, and to give all their work an inner consistency. Second, the canonical text translated was in the main like the consonantal text of the MT. Third, their work made sense to themselves, and when the modern reader is puzzled by it, the fault probably lies with him or her, not the translator. Fourth, the text is of great value on its own terms, as the earliest exegetical source for the Pentateuch, and not simply as a grabbag for textual emendations.¹⁸

A. Aejmelaeus confirms that the translator of Exodus was competent, in fact, one of the best in the Pentateuch. In Exodus, we see an unusual freedom of translation which takes into account the requirements of Greek idiom on one hand, and a faithful rendering of the Hebrew text on the other. He was able to change grammatical renderings to better reflect Greek idiom, but he did not always do so. At times he changed the word-order of the original, but most of the time, he followed the original word-order. He could add and omit words and grammatical items, but he was not indifferent or careless.¹⁹ Sanderson's evaluation of the Septuagintal text of Exodus confirms that it is indeed a faithful rendering of the Hebrew *Vorlage*.

A few readings seem so literal as to have produced wooden, "Semitic" Greek (e.g., "to fill the hands"), but most seem relatively literal but without being "translation Greek" (e.g., not repeating a pronoun when it was required in Hebrew but not in Greek). A few suggest greater concern for the thought than for the actual words, and thus greater freedom which still successfully renders the ideas (e.g., "glory" and "above all")...it preserves uniquely preferable shorter readings as well as uniquely secondary longer readings.²⁰

The Septuagint, as a translation that reflects the religious understandings and traditions of its target audience, is regarded as one of the earliest witnesses to the history of biblical interpretation. Scholars are increasingly turning to it more to understand the early methods and

¹⁸ J. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), xiv–xvi.

¹⁹ "Septuagintal Translation Techniques," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings*, (edited by G.J. Brooke and B. Lindars, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 388–9. See also A. Aejmelaeus in "What Can We Know about the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint?" *ZAW* 99 (1987): 71–77. His opinion is confirmed by Le Boulluec and P. Sandevor, *La Bible d'Alexandrie: L'Exode* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 31.

²⁰ J. Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran* (HSM 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 255 and 256. See also pp. 243–255 and 256–9.

traditions of biblical interpretation and less to establish the text of its *Vorlage*, a shift due in part to an increased respect for the MT.²¹

The significant variances between the MT and LXX are as follows, with the underlined letters signifying the additions in Greek.²²

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Gen 15:14 יצאו | ἐξελεύσονται ὧδε | Brenton translates, “they shall come forth hither.” ²³ The addition seeks to apply the promise to not only the Exodus but the conquest. |
| 2. Exod 3:21 בעיני | ἐναντίον | The Hebrew ‘in the eyes of’ becomes ‘in the presence of,’ which is conceptually very similar, but more comfortable in Greek than the Hebrew idiom. |
| 3. והיה־כי | No equivalent | This temporal marker would be otiose in Greek. ²⁴ |
| 4. תלכו ריקם
בי תלכון לא | ὅταν δὲ ἀποτρέχητε
οὐκ ἀπελεύσεσθε | The variation in Greek avoids the duplication of the Hebrew verb הלך, yet no lexical distinction is intended. ²⁵ |
| 5. Exod 3:22
ומגרת ביתה
משכנתה | παρὰ γείτονος καὶ
συσκήνου αὐτῆς | The מן and the possessive ה־ are not repeated to avoid what in Greek sounds repetitious, and both παρὰ and αὐτῆς modify the coordinate noun phrase, per standard Greek usage. |

²¹ The newer appreciation for the MT is reflected broadly in the more cautious approach put forth in E. Tov’s *The Text-Critical Use*.

²² I assume the Septuagint text as it appears in the Göttingen Septuagint, and will not explore textual critical issues internal to the Greek texts.

²³ L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Bagster & Sons, 1851; republished Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 1986), 17.

²⁴ Wevers, *Notes*, 38. Wevers notes that these temporal clauses are sometimes omitted, but sometimes included, in a variety of ways, in spite of their otiose nature in Greek (Exod 4:9, 12:26, 13:5, 11).

²⁵ Wevers, *Notes*, 38. N. Collins in “Evidence in the Septuagint of a Tradition in Which the Israelites Left Egypt without Pharaoh’s Consent” *CBQ* 56 (1995): 446, argues that the variation between verbs is an indication of an early textual tradition that understands the exodus as a furtive escape from Egypt without Pharaoh’s consent (reading, “to escape and run away”). Wever’s explanation above is less tenuous, and the biblical evidence fails to support Collins’ theory. See note 37.

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|---|--|---|
| 6. וכלי זהב
כלי-כסף | σκεύη ²⁶ ἀργυρᾶ
καὶ χρυσᾶ | The Hebrew ‘vessels’ is not repeated. |
| 7. שמלת | ἱματισμόν | The plural ‘clothes’ is rightly changed to the collective Greek noun, since it is clothing in general, rather than specific garments taken. ²⁷ |
| 8. Exod 11:1 בלה | σὺν παντί | The Hebrew expresses the fullness of a deed, in this case, the expulsion, but may have been read or interpreted in the Septuagint as <i>kol</i> . ²⁸ |
| 9. Exod 11:2
דבר-נא באזני
העם | λάλησον οὖν
κρυφῇ εἰς τὰ ὦτα | The translator makes the act of ‘speaking in the ears’ explicitly secretive. |
| 10. איש סאת
רעתו מאת
רעותה ואשה | παρὰ τοῦ πλησίον
καὶ γυνὴ παρὰ τῆς
πλησιόν | The definite article in Greek functions possessively, so that the possessive pronouns in Hebrew have no Greek equivalent. |
| 11. כלי-כסף
וכלי זהב | σκεύη ἀργυρᾶ
καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ
<u>ἱματισμόν</u> | Greek does not repeat ‘vessels’ and adds ‘and clothes’ to reflect 3:22 and 12:35. ²⁹ |
| 12. Exod 11:3
ויתן יהוה
את-חן העם | κύριος δὲ ἔδωκεν
τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ
<u>αὐτοῦ</u> | The addition of the possessive <i>autou</i> stresses the covenantal relationship. ³⁰ |
| 13. בעיני מצרים | ἐναντίον τῶν
Αἰγυπτίων | See 2 above. |
| 14. | καὶ ἔχρησαν
αὐτοῖς | Based on והשאלום in 12:36, again an attempt to harmonize the accounts. |

²⁶ Le Boulluec and Sandevor write, “*Skeúē* (cf. Ex 11, 2 et 12, 35) est à comprendre ici au sens le plus general d’«objets» (cf. Gn 24, 53),” (*La Bible*, 95).

²⁷ Wevers, *Notes*, 39.

²⁸ Le Boulluec and Sandevor, *La Bible*, 141. They render it, “il vous expulsera *avec tout* par expulsion.”

²⁹ Le Boulluec and Sandevor write, “Selon sa tendance harmonisante, la LXX introduit ici les «vêtements» (*kai himatismos*): cf. Ex 3, 22 et 12, 35,” (*La Bible*, 141).

³⁰ Wevers, *Notes*, 163 and 187.

15. Exod 12:35 בדבר משה	καθὰ συνέταξεν αὐτοῖς Μωσῆς	The Hebrew bound “according to the command of Moses” is rendered “as Moses commanded” with the addition of the dative plural pronoun to add specificity.
17. בלי־כסף וכלי זהב	σκεύη ἀργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ	Greek does not repeat ‘vessels.’
18. Exod 12:36 ויהוה נתן את־חן העם	κύριος δὲ ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ	See 12 above.
19. בעיני מצרים	ἐναντίον τῶν Αἰγυπτίων	See 2 above.

Most of the variations listed above are fairly minor and are those necessary for any translation to take into account the idiom of the language into which one is translating (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18). Some seek to harmonize accounts (11, 14), others to stress and explicate divine promise and covenant (1, 12, 15, 17). Yet, the addition of κρυφῇ (9 above) adds an important interpretive element to the translation. As stated above, the addition of this word makes the command of God specifically deal with furtive preparations for despoliation.

Exod 3:2 So speak *secretly* into the ears of the people, and have each man ask from his neighbor, and (each) woman from her neighbor for silver and gold articles *and clothing*.

The translators could easily have rendered the phrase ‘speak in the ears of the people’ something like ‘speak directly to the people,’ as in the case of Num 11:1 which translates בעיני מצרים with ἐναντίον τῶν Αἰγυπτίων.³¹ We have just encountered other similar examples above (2, 13, 18). Wevers has written that this addition makes explicit what is implicit in the MT.³² While this is open to debate, it is without doubt that our translators took what *could* be understood as a secretive command and translated it explicitly so.³³ In other words, the LXX interprets the words “in the ears of the people” as indicating a clandestine opera-

³¹ See also Gen 23:10; 44:18, Num 11:18;

³² Wevers, *Notes*, 162.

³³ Collins vigorously protests, claiming that this is not supported by any commentary she knows (Collins, “Evidence,” 443). In other words, the Hebrew “in the ears of” does not necessarily imply a secret.

tion which prepared the way for the eventual despoliation of Egypt. Yet this was not necessarily the meaning of the Hebrew text nor did the translators have a habit of interpreting the phrase in that way. The phrase “in the ears of” following a verb of speech appears 16 times in the Pentateuch (besides our text), and in none of these instances does it imply in Hebrew (nor is it translated into Greek) a secretive communication of any sort.³⁴ While the theory put forth by Collins, that the addition is evidence of an early text form in which the Israelites escape without Pharaoh’s consent, is not demanded by the evidence, it is clear that the LXX text correctly interprets that the planning stages of the despoliation were carried out in secret.³⁵ The secretive nature of the preparation, the unawareness of the Egyptians of their plans to escape, and the Egyptian understanding of the things given as loans rather than gifts, are heightened by this addition.

Wevers notes also that the translation of נצלתם with σκυλεύσετε in 3:22 (and 12:36), which he says is undoubtedly the correct text, is an indication that the LXX translators, in contrast to later theologians, had no difficulty in accepting the notion of God’s advice to plunder the Egyptians.³⁶ We find no attempt to minimize the “plunder” theme by softening the language, or by shaping the translation toward the ‘gifts freely given’ or ‘fair wages’ motifs. The translation not only retains the ‘plunder’ theme, it intensifies the clandestine nature of it, thus laying the groundwork for the charge of fraudulent deception. These two factors indicate that at the time of translation, the charge of fraud for the despoliation either didn’t exist or was unknown to the translators of the Greek Pentateuch. If this accusation was being made in Egypt at the time of the LXX translation, the translators would likely have known about it and been sensitive to it. Thus our text may reflect the early goodwill between the Alexandrian Jews and the Ptolemaic government, and the playfulness with which the Jews could enjoy the story of their great success in getting just repayment even from the unwitting Egyptian overlords. It also suggests that the translation was

³⁴ Gen 20:8; 23:10, 13, 16; 44:18; 50:4; Exod 10:2; 17:14; 24:7; Num 11:1, 18; 14:28; Deut 5:1; 31:28, 30; 32:44.

³⁵ The LXX reading makes good sense in its context since the Israelites *were* planning a secret escape; Pharaoh thought they were going out only to sacrifice in the desert. One need not assume an earlier text-form in which they made their exit without Pharaoh’s consent.

³⁶ Wevers, *Notes*, 39.

carried out primarily for the synagogue, and not intended for public consumption.

Since the charge of fraud was unknown to the translators of the LXX at the time of their work, this translation itself provides us with a *terminus a quo* for the beginning of the charge, at least as it was known in Alexandria. One could almost guess that the Greek world first became aware that there were grounds for such a charge by reading the Septuagint. The addition of the word *secretly* (or literally *in secret*) to the translation brought special attention to the despoliation and encouraged the feeling among the Alexandrians that their ancestors (even the Ptolemaic royalty claimed ancestry in ancient Egypt) had been treated badly by the Jews during the exodus. What may have originally been a harmless or playful addition, which highlighted their success in getting even with the oppressive Egyptian overlords, became a great bone of contention for later generations.

THE BOOK OF JUBILEES

The *Book of Jubilees* is a quintessential example of a genre of ancient literature known as 'rewritten Bible.' Also included in this genre are the fragmentarily preserved *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo. The term 'rewritten Bible' was coined by Geza Vermes, who by it describes the texts which anticipate questions and solve problems in advance by the midrashic insertion of *haggadic* developments into the biblical narrative.¹ 'Rewritten Bible' is the result of the regular reading of Scripture and constant meditation on it, supplementing its stories, resolving its textual and doctrinal difficulties, which resulted in a pre-rabbinic *haggadah* that was eventually introduced into the scriptural narrative itself.² The *Book of Jubilees* rewrites the biblical version of Genesis 1–Exodus 14 as if it were dictated to Moses on Mt. Sinai by an 'angel of the presence' who speaks of himself to Moses.³ This fiction carries to the end, with the angel drawing on 'heavenly tablets' (1:29) to which he constantly refers. The writer, in this way, grants his version of the primeval history special authority, and seeks to undercut those parties within Israel that would disagree. The author's treatment of the biblical materials varies widely. One finds examples of verbatim reproduction, deletion, additions, re-ordering, all with a view to recasting the narrative in line with his interests and purposes. The author freely alters or omits what appears scandalous to him or simply omits what has no interest to him.⁴

Since its introduction to Western scholars at the end of the 19th Century, *Jubilees* has been dated to the second century B.C.E. A considerable number of fragments of it have been identified at Qumran, a fact that, when taken together with the similarities in teaching between *Jubilees* and those of the Essenes (most obviously the 364-day solar calendar), its association with the precursors of the Qumran community is made likely. Explicit citation of *Jubilees* in the Damascus Document

¹ *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 95.

² G. Vermes and Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:308.

³ The angel usually addresses Moses in the 1st person plural (I and the other angels) and sometimes in the first person singular. This is evident in the context we will discuss, *Jub* 48:4, 13.

⁴ Vermes and Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:310.

(CD 16:3f.) indicates a *terminus ad quem* of 100 B.C.E. A *terminus a quo* is provided by *Jubilees*' reflection of details of the Hellenistic reform early in the second century.⁵

VanderKam and Nickelsburg differ as to exactly when in the 2nd Century B.C.E. *Jubilees* was composed. VanderKam has placed the *terminus a quo* at 161 B.C.E., since 34:2–9 refers to Judas Maccabaeus' victory over Nicanor at that time. The *terminus ad quem* is determined by numerous factors. While *Jubilees* has many points of similarity with Qumran theology, the author worships in Jerusalem (49:21 refers in the third person to those who live elsewhere), yet there is no hint of a wicked high priest. *Jubilees* neither advocates nor knows of any separation from the broader society and cult of Israel. Its provenance therefore predates the schism of the Essene community, which occurred no later than 140. The 'glowing terms' with which *Jubilees* describes the Jerusalem priesthood indicate the author knows nothing of the Hasmonaean high priesthood, suggesting a date before Jonathan's accession in 152 B.C.E.⁶

Nickelsburg has criticized VanderKam's dating noting that the identification of *Jubilees* 34:2–9 and 37–38 as descriptors of the Maccabean wars is far from certain, and depends on a number of textual emendations. Second, many of the additions to the biblical text concern tensions in Jew-Gentile relationships (for instance, strictures against nakedness and uncircumcision in 3:31 and 15:34). This would indicate a time before the Maccabean wars, when these questions heated the religious anxieties of the day. The apocalypse in *Jubilees* 23:16ff. makes no reference to the person of Antiochus IV or to his pollution of the temple and his edict.⁷ This is a highly unusual omission for a document written by a person of the period, especially with its anxious concern for the threat posed by the Hellenists. These considerations lead Nickelsburg to the conclusion that *Jubilees* was written during the time of the Hellenistic reforms close to 168 B.C.E. The writer pre-dated Antiochus'

⁵ Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," *Jewish Writings of the Second-Temple Period* (Ed. M. Stone. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 101.

⁶ J. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1977), 214–85.

⁷ It surprises me that Nickelsburg does not see 23:21 as an indication of the desecration of Antiochus IV; "and they will pollute the holy of holies with their pollution." While this passage describes specifically the activity of the hellenized Jews, this could speak to their participation with the Syrians.

temple desecrations. He wrote from a historical context in which the anti-gentile warnings addressed an immediate threat.⁸

In spite of questions concerning its exact historical context, it is clear that the work arose from within the Jerusalemite priesthood; specifically from those priests who resisted the ideology and policies of the Hellenizing priests. *Jubilees* demands first and foremost strict separation from the Gentiles.⁹ Testuz has written of its purpose:

Si le Livre des Jubilés est une histoire du peuple d'Israël, c'est une histoire pleine de doctrine, écrite dans un but défini : présenter aux lecteurs quelles sont la destinée unique et la situation unique d'Israël peuple de Dieu, unis à Lui par une Alliance éternelle. Il insiste sur la nécessité d'observer les lois et les usages juifs, jusque dans leurs plus petits détails, car ce sont eux qui font d'Israël ce qu'il est, un peuple à part. L'auteur veut convaincre ses lecteurs, en puisant ses exemples dans l'histoire, de la place et du rôle prééminents que Dieu a réservés à Israël dans le monde, et les convertir et les encourager à vivre une vie religieuse intense et irréprochable, telle qu'il la conçoit.¹⁰

The only sections of *Jubilees* which explicitly mention the despoliation are 14:14 and 48:18–19.

¹⁴ (cf. Gen 15:14) But I will judge that people whom they will serve. And afterward they will come forth from there with many possessions.

¹⁸ (cf. Exod 12:35–36) And on the fourteenth day we bound him [Mastema] so that he might not accuse the children of Israel on the day when they were requesting vessels and clothing from the men of Egypt—vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of bronze—so that they might plunder the Egyptians in exchange for the servitude which they subjected them to by force. ¹⁹ And we did not bring the children of Israel from Egypt in their nakedness.¹¹

The first text follows the MT with remarkable exactness; the only addition is, 'from there.' The LXX has ὦδε, which also has no equivalent in the Hebrew, but means 'back here' rather than 'from there.' *Jubilees*

⁸ Nickelsburg, "Bible Rewritten," 102–3.

⁹ J. Endres, S.J., *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (Washington DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987), 247. See also J. VanderKam, "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of *Jubilees*," in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (eds. M. Albani et al.: Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 19–22.

¹⁰ M. Testuz, *Les idées religieuses du livre des Jubilés* (Geneve: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), 9.

¹¹ Texts, unless otherwise indicated, will follow the translation of O. Wintermute in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. Charlesworth, New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:52–142.

follows the whole story of Abraham's covenant renewal in Gen 15 with unusual exactness. In his study of the exegetical strategies in *Jubilees* 1–2, G. Brooke notes that there are fewer examples of exact quotation than one would expect, and that the book of *Jubilees* is a more thorough rewrite than has been previously thought.¹² The unusually straightforward presentation of the biblical narration confirms the supposition that the writer found little in Gen 15 needing alteration. This will be explored further below.

The interpretive layering in ch. 48:18–19 bears marks of heavy alteration. Five alterations will be discussed and identified in terms of the categories of biblical interpretation laid out in G. Vermes' "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis."¹³ According to Vermes, two fundamental types of biblical interpretation arose, beginning even in the biblical period, but primarily in the post-biblical period and in response to differing types of problems presented by the sacred texts. The first category of exegesis responded to one of four possible difficulties presented by the text itself. First, a scriptural passage contained a word whose exact meaning escaped the interpreter. Second, it lacked sufficient detail. Third, it seemed to contradict other biblical texts. Fourth, its apparent meaning was unacceptable. This category Vermes calls 'Pure' Exegesis.

'Applied' exegesis is not primarily concerned with the immediate meaning of the text but with providing a non-scriptural problem with a scriptural solution, and thus make sacred scripture relevant to polemics and issues contemporary to his day. The point of departure here is no longer the Torah but contemporary customs and beliefs which the interpreter justifies by connecting them to scripture. This style of interpretation accompanied the rise of religious parties, and in particular, the Pharisees, and typically conformed to well-defined rules called *middôt*, which they used to forge a link between the 'written Torah' and the 'oral Law,' the latter having encompassed customs whose scriptural justifications had long since been forgotten.¹⁴

'Applied' exegesis sought to (1) determine the validity or otherwise of sectarian claims, (2) interpret biblical texts, especially prophecy, as

¹² "Exegetical Strategies in *Jubilees* 1–2," *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (eds. M. Albani et al.: Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 55.

¹³ *Cambridge History of the Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1.199–231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

having a detailed application to the history of one's own sect, and (3) to interpret so as to apply scripture to new changes in religious thought.¹⁵ Thus, 'pure' exegesis tries to explain the text *qua* text, and 'applied' exegesis seeks to relate the text to current issues and trends.¹⁶ Dimant suggests the terms 'exegesis' and 'interpretation'. 'Exegesis' seeks to explain the biblical text, and 'interpretation' uses biblical and non-biblical material to create an independent text.¹⁷ Two other studies are of relevance. J. Endres' study *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* applies the categories of Vermes to *Jubilees* specifically.¹⁸ Van Ruiten's *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* seeks to get a clear picture of exactly how the biblical story of Genesis 1–11 is rewritten, in part, by classifying the similarities and dissimilarities.¹⁹

The first alteration in *Jubilees* 48: 18–19 is that the ordering of events is out-of-sync with the MT. In fact, *Jubilees* jumps forward in the Exodus story and then moves backward from there. *Jubilees* 48:5–11 deals with the plagues in Exod 7:14–1:10. *Jubilees* 48:12–14 skips forward to the destruction of the Egyptian army at the sea (Exod 14:5ff). In verses 14–17, the Angel explains to Moses that from the 14th day (Passover) until the 18th day (the day of the destruction of the Egyptian army), the angels bound up Mastema. In 48:18–19, the writer focuses his attention on the despoliation itself (14th day of the first month), when the children of Israel requested and received the treasures of Egypt. Chapter 49 relates the biblical law concerning the feast of Passover, which again moves backward in the biblical text (from Exod 12:35–36 to 12:1–30).

<i>Jubilees</i> 48:5–11	Exod 7:14–11:10
<i>Jubilees</i> 48:12–13	Exod 14:5ff
<i>Jubilees</i> 48:14–17	No parallel, but this covers the period described in Exodus 13:17–4:4
<i>Jubilees</i> 48:18–19	Exod 12:35–36
<i>Jubilees</i> 49	Exod 12:1–30

¹⁵ Ibid., 223–226.

¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹⁷ D. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha" in *Mikra* (ed. M.J. Mulder, Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 382–383.

¹⁸ (Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987).

¹⁹ (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 3–4.

‘Rearrangement’ is a fairly standard feature of the writer’s exegetical style.²⁰ This begs the question, “Why did the writer rearrange the story in this way?” The rearranged story separates out the legal/ritual material on Passover from the narrative, resulting in distinct blocks of text: narrative first, legal second. The writer may have wanted to clarify and separate these categories of biblical material. Yet, the author shifts quite easily and regularly from biblical narrative to law elsewhere. In many instances, the writer provides *halakha* in instances for which the Bible provides none by folding these *halakhot* directly into the biblical narrative. For instance, *Jubilees* 2:18–33 expands on the 7th day of creation, and adds *halakha* concerning the keeping of the Sabbath into the biblical narrative. Many similar instances can be provided.²¹

The purpose of the rearrangement also resulted in a gathering together of materials which deal with God’s vengeance upon Egypt. Chapter 48:5ff speaks to the various acts of vengeance brought upon Egypt by the Lord and His angels; from the plagues, to the destruction at the sea, and finally the despoliation. The central theme of ch. 48, in fact, is the vengeance of God poured out on Egypt. The gathering together of these materials heightens and highlights the vengeance in the biblical story by tying together the vengeance of the plagues with the destruction at the sea, and the despoliation (in that order). The rearranged insertion of the despoliation story at the end of chapter 48 provides a segue into chapter 49, and its recounting of the laws dealing with Pesach. Divine vengeance is a primary theme in *Jubilees*, a point to be explored below. The congruence between the results of the writer’s alterations here with his purposes elsewhere confirm this analysis. He rearranged the biblical story to isolate and thus heighten divine vengeance against Israel’s enemies.

Since there is no issue or question arising out of the biblical text to bring about these rearrangements, this is an example of ‘Applied’ exegesis. It falls into Vermes’ first category as the theme of vengeance against Israel’s enemies reflects the sectarian aims of the writer. We have noted above that a primary theme is the necessity of strict separation from the gentiles. Within the framework of its theology of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel, *Jubilees* isolates two basic camps of humanity; those of the chosen line which descended through Jacob, and all others.

²⁰ Ibid., 368 and 373.

²¹ Ibid., 365–367.

These camps must be strictly segregated from each other.²² The writer emphasizes the vengeance of God on all who practice idolatry as a way of preventing the barriers between Jew and Gentile from breaking down, and to protect the religious and ethnic purity of the race.

A second and a third alteration occur in the words of vs. 18, "And on the fourteenth day we bound him (Mastema) so that he might not accuse the children of Israel..." The first person plural language of vs. 18–19 flows from the narrative structure of the book as a whole, and for this reason, I do not consider it here a specific alteration. As stated above, *Jubilees* was written as the revelation from an 'angel of the presence' to Moses while on Mt. Sinai. 'We' refers to the angels acting in concert with the wishes of God.

The second alteration then, is the addition of the idea that Mastema was bound by angels. A short excursus on *Jubilees'* usage of the titles for the Accuser will help lay the groundwork. He goes primarily by the name 'Mastema' in the book of *Jubilees*; a biblical term (Hos 9:7) which means 'hatred, hostility, enmity.' The name is based on the Hebrew verb *štm*, which means 'to bear a grudge' or 'to cherish animosity against.' It is in turn a cognate with *štn* the verb upon which the word 'satan' is based, meaning 'to act as an adversary' or 'to slander.' In biblical Hebrew *śāṭān* is more an adjective or title than a personal name, and can be rendered either as, 'adversary,' 'accuser' in a legal sense, or 'slanderer.'²³ While *Jubilees* uses Mastema as a title for the adversary more than Satan (13 uses of 'Mastema' compared to 8 times for 'Satan'), its use of the name 'Satan' is particularly important. *Jubilees* (23:29), and *The Assumption of Moses* (10:1), both of which date to the same period, are the earliest evidence of Satan used as a personal name.²⁴

Jubilees uses these supernatural realities to the fullest of their explanatory power, especially in terms of God and his relation to evil/tragedy here on earth. *Jubilees* continually stresses the helplessness of humankind; evil and all human suffering flow from the machinations of Prince Mastema and his demons. God is in no way responsible for human suffering.²⁵ The author recasts the biblical story with great freedom and

²² J. VanderKam, "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of *Jubilees*" in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (eds. M. Albani et al.: Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 18–19. See also the Testuz quotation in footnote 30.

²³ Hamilton, "Satan," *ABD*, 5:986.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:987.

²⁵ Wintermute, "*Jubilees*," in *OTP*, 2:47.

confidence to fit this perspective. Only a few verses earlier (48:12; cf. Exod 4:18f.) we see the author making Mastema, not Yahweh, the one who sought to kill Moses on the way to Egypt. In 49:2, Mastema is the death angel of Exodus. *Jubilees* continually stresses the helplessness of men (10:1f., 8) and nations (15:31) before the power of Mastema. While God is not responsible for evil, God can use Mastema as a pawn to accomplish his purposes, as in 48:17; “And he (Mastema) hardened their hearts (the Egyptians) and strengthened them. And it was conceived of by the LORD our God that he might smite the Egyptians and throw them into the midst of the sea.”

The writer believes that Mastema wanted to hinder the despoliation by bringing accusations against the children of Israel. This would destroy the favor which God had granted them and thus put an end to the exchange of precious goods. The angels stopped Mastema, and thus God’s plan for the despoliation could go forward unhindered. The addition falls into the first category of ‘applied’ exegesis of Vermes. Endres calls this type of exegesis ‘haggadic midrash’ since it seeks to apply the scripture to the doctrinal concerns of the author.²⁶

The third alteration comes in the same sentence, in the telic clause, “so that he might not accuse them.” The ‘he’ has Mastema as its antecedent (earlier in vs. 15). While *Jubilees* here does not refer to the adversary in ch. 48 as Satan, the association of Mastema with the verb ‘accuse,’ in verses 15 and 18, is intentional. It is based on the tradition that Satan’s primary duty is to bring accusation against the people of God. As stated previously, the meaning of *šālān* is ‘accuser,’ or better yet, ‘slanderer.’ The Hebrew meaning bears import for the interpretation of *Jubilees*, even though the only complete extant texts are Ethiopic, since *Jubilees* was originally written in Hebrew.

We noted above that the use of this ‘Satan the slanderer’ tradition here may be a response to the biblical text, which speaks of the favor God gave to the Hebrews in the eyes of the Egyptians. Since Satan is ‘The Accuser’ or ‘Slanderer,’ his method of counteracting God’s favor, and thus stopping the despoliation, was to accuse the children of Israel of wrong-doing (*Jub* 48:18). Yet this does not explain our text fully. Satan as ‘slanderer’ is not a theme that is ubiquitous in *Jubilees*. The word ‘slander’ or ‘accuse’ appears only three times in association with the adversary. In the first (1:20), the adversary goes by the

²⁶ Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 212–14.

name ‘Beliar’, a text we shall explore further below. The other two instances are actually in our context (vs. 15 and 18), and as I will seek to demonstrate, in both these cases, the satanic accusation relates to the despoliation.

¹⁵ And on the fourteenth day, and on the fifteenth, and on the sixteenth, and on the seventeenth, and on the eighteenth Prince Mastema was bound and shut up from (coming) after the children of Israel so that he might not accuse them... ¹⁸And on the fourteenth day we bound him so that he might not accuse the children of Israel on the day when they were requesting vessels and clothing from the men of Egypt...so that they might plunder the Egyptians in exchange for the servitude which they subjected them to by force.

It has been suggested by some that the accusation of vs.15 was Mastema’s attempt to prevent the Exodus.²⁷ The same is implied in Wintermute’s translation above, for by adding ‘(coming)’ to the text, the purpose of the binding of Mastema becomes the facilitation of the exodus. VanderKam’s translation has, “Mastema was bound and locked up behind the Israelites so that he could not accuse them.”²⁸ The Charles translation also states only that Mastema was bound behind the children of Israel. Neither the VanderKam nor the Charles translations necessitate that Mastema was bound to allow the Exodus to proceed, only that Satan was bound up behind them.

Verse eighteen picks up the line of thought in verse 15 and has the angel claim, “we bound him so that he might not accuse the children of Israel...so that they might plunder the Egyptians.” Thus, both instances of the verbs ‘bind’ and ‘accuse’ function together, with verse 18 taking up the thought-flow from verse 15. The primary reason for the angelic binding of the Accuser, in both verses, was to prevent Mastema from bringing accusation against Israel of foul play in the despoliation, and thus to allow the despoliation to eventuate according to God’s plan. Or again, Mastema was bound because his intention to accuse Israel of foul play would prevent the despoliation, and the despoliation was crucial in God’s plan to bring vengeance upon Egypt. Satan was unbound on day 19 so that he could spur the Egyptians to pursue after Israel into the opened sea, and God’s vengeance upon Egypt could continue through to the end. Satan’s role is that of a

²⁷ N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 188.

²⁸ *The Book of Jubilees* (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 2.315.

feckless pawn in the hands of a righteous but vengeful God. All in all, the passage highlights the importance of the despoliation in God's overall plan to bring his righteous vengeance upon Egypt.

In two of the three instances where *Jubilees* speaks of Satan accusing the children of Israel (48:15 and 18), the object of the accusation is the plundering of Egypt. Because there is no hint in the Exodus narrative of accusation of any sort (satanic or human) brought against the Hebrews for the despoliation, and because the role of Satan as the slanderer is not a standard feature in the *Jubilees*, it is probable that this theme arises from the social context of the writer. The author, aware of slurs against the Jews of his day based on the despoliation, considers them to be the inspiration of Mastema himself. We are again dealing with 'applied' exegesis in general, and an haggadic midrash in particular, which seeks to answer the anti-Jewish slander brought against the Jews.²⁹

These accusations leveled by Gentiles against Jews for the despoliation of Egypt, in the mind of the author, are the machinations of Mastema himself. This flows from the broader theme in *Jubilees* by which Satan is described as the personification and motivation of the hostility Israel experienced from Gentiles. The satanic explanation for anti-Semitism is particularly evident in the preamble (1:19–20), whereby the historical and spiritual (satanic) enemies are described in parallel and thus in concert with each other.³⁰ In this passage, mentioned above, Beliar (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Beli'al*, which means 'worthless') substitutes for 'Mastema.'

¹⁹And Moses fell upon his face, and he prayed and said, "O Lord, my God, do not abandon your people and your inheritance to walk in the error of their heart. And do not deliver them into the hand of their enemy, the gentiles, lest they rule over them and cause them to sin against you. ²⁰"O Lord, let your mercy be lifted upon your people, and create for them an upright spirit. And do not let the spirit of Beliar rule over them to accuse them before you and ensnare them from every path of righteousness so that they might be destroyed from before your face.

The fourth alteration of the text deals with what was plundered from Egypt and why. *Jubilees* adds 'vessels of bronze' to the biblical 'vessels

²⁹ Haggadic midrash is a category of 'applied' midrash described in Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, ch. 7.

³⁰ Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 189. See *Jubilees* 23:29–30 and 46:1–2. Note particularly in 46:1–2, where the absence of Satan in the days of Joseph resulted in the Egyptians honoring the Hebrews.

of silver and gold.’ Kugel notes that these bronze vessels are added because, during the Israelites’ desert wanderings, they were instructed to build a tabernacle, many parts of which were made of bronze. The Israelites presumably brought the bronze needed for the tabernacle with them from Egypt as plunder, along with the silver and gold and other fine things mentioned in connection with the tabernacle.³¹ This tradition stems from the question; “Where did the gold, silver and bronze used to construct the tabernacle come from? How did escaped slaves wandering around in a desert construct a tabernacle rich in gold, silver and bronze?” While it is nowhere mentioned in the Bible, the notion that the items necessary to construct the tabernacle in the wilderness came from the vessels plundered from Egypt is stated explicitly in later traditions and stands behind the addition of bronze here.³² This falls into the category of ‘pure’ exegesis, since it seeks to add explanatory detail to the text, and to answer questions which arise from the text itself.

The fifth exegetical alteration is perhaps the most subtle and the most powerful in its interpretive force. In our study of the biblical context and meaning of the despoliation (see Introduction), we saw that as the story progresses from Genesis to Exodus, the emphasis shifts from vengeance to mercy. In Gen 15:14, the despoliation is an act of justifiable vengeance upon the oppressors of Israel. Yet in Exodus, God uses the plagues as an act of mercy to bring a knowledge of himself to Israel, Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and to the ends of the earth. The question of the character and nature of God becomes particularly manifest in Pharaoh’s proud question, “Who is Yahweh?” (Exod 5:2). The story from that point develops so as to answer that question, and to make the LORD known, not only to the Hebrews (6:3, 7; 10:2) but to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (7:5; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18) and eventually to all the peoples of the earth (15:14–15; 18:8–12).³³ God’s purpose for the plagues is most clearly identified in 9:14–16 in words to be spoken to Pharaoh himself.

³¹ *The Bible As It Was*, 325.

³² Haggai 2:5–9 may represent the beginning of this interpretive connection between the plundered riches of Egypt and the materials used to construct the tabernacle. There, Haggai speaks of that which God promised Israel during the exodus in close association with the promise to provide the wealth of their neighbors for the beautification of the second temple.

³³ Gowan *Exodus*, 133–37.

¹⁴For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that (בְּעִבּוֹר) you may know that there is none like Me in all the world. ¹⁵I could have stretched forth my hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth.³⁴ ¹⁶Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose (בְּעִבּוֹר twice): in order (לְמַעַן) to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world (NJPS).

We also noted that in *Jubilees* 14, which retells the enactment of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, the biblical story is followed quite closely. Some explanatory additions are made, but the original tone remains unchanged. Where Gen. 15 emphasizes divine vengeance, so does *Jubilees* 14.

We see none of the biblical interest in the salvation of Egyptians (“that they may know that the LORD is God”) in *Jubilees*’ depiction of the plundering of Egypt. Throughout, the repeated emphasis upon the wrath of God against the Egyptians cuts against the grain of the biblical text. In 48:3, Moses is sent to “execute judgment and vengeance upon the Egyptians.” In vs. 5, the Lord executes vengeance upon Egypt on account of Israel. Later in vs. 5, the Lord executes judgment upon the gods of Egypt and burns them with fire. In vs. 7, the ten plagues are called ‘judgments’ by which Moses brought vengeance upon Egypt. In vs. 8, the angel says that God acted in accordance with his covenant with Abraham by which he took vengeance on the Egyptians just as the Egyptians made Israel serve by force. In vs. 14, God avenged the children cast into the Nile by Egyptians one thousand to one (1,000,000 Egyptian soldiers perished in the sea for the 1000 Hebrew children who died). In vs. 16–17, Mastema hardened the hearts of the Egyptians so that they rushed into the sea after the escapees. This was God’s plan to bring vengeance upon Egypt.

In vs. 18, we noted the words, “so that they might plunder the Egyptians in exchange for the servitude which they subjected them to by force.” VanderKam’s translation reads, “in return for the fact that they were made to work when they enslaved them by force.” Charles has, “in return for the bondage in which they have forced them to serve.” Is this divine vengeance or the forced payment of a fair wage? Kugel cites this passage as an example of the despoliation understood as ‘Fair Wages at Last.’³⁵ The difference between an enforced payment of

³⁴ There is no basis in the text for the conditional rendering, ‘I could have . . .’ (see also RSV, NIV and NEB). The LXX translates hnk with the future indicative Ἀπατάξω.

³⁵ Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 324.

a wage and vengeance is subtle, and the language in translation could be read either way. But the wording of the Charles and VanderKam makes vengeance an interpretive option. To do something 'in exchange' for something else implies fair play, but to do something 'in return' *could* refer to punishment pure and simple.

While the concept of vengeance is perceived in a pejorative sense today, the Hebrew Bible (usually using the verb *nqm*) typically presents vengeance positively as a type of action appropriate, with limitations, particularly to God.³⁶ The term arose from a legal context: proper vengeance, within limitations, rectifies and thus cancels an injustice. While it can take on a negative meaning in the Hebrew Bible (revenge inflicted by wicked people upon the innocent), its more usual meaning is positive (just punishment upon a wrongdoer, or recompense given to the victim of wrongdoing). The avenger par excellence in the Hebrew Bible is God himself, who brings just recompense upon those who attack Israel which restores balance which has been upset by wickedness. Individuals frequently ask God for vengeance (Judg 16:28; Jer 11:20; 15:15; 20:12; Ps 79:10) and thus people do not need to exercise vengeance themselves (I Sam 24:13), and the righteous may rejoice (Ps 58:11).

The Essenes believed (CD 9:2–5) that God alone was to take vengeance on his enemies, a belief which they based on their interpretation of Lev 19:18.³⁷ God, in fact, will severely punish those who "have taken revenge and borne malice" (CD 8:5–6). Other documents from Qumran show extensive use of the root *nqm*, reflecting their separatist attitude, especially in terms of the covenantal vengeance which is executed on gentiles with the avenging sword.³⁸ The punishment of the wicked and the reward of the just are central themes for *Jubilees*. M. Testuz has written,

Voilà donc comment se trouvent énoncées dans le Livre des Jubilés les doctrines des deux catégories d'esprits et des deux voies morales divergentes, avec l'exposé des œuvres des ceux qui les suivent, leur recompense ou leur châtiment pendant leur vie, et le jugement final qui attend les uns et les autres.³⁹

³⁶ W. Pitard, "Vengeance," *ABD*, 6.786.

³⁷ *TDOT*: 10:9.

³⁸ *TLOT*: 2:769.

³⁹ Testuz, *Les Idées Religieuses*, 97.

Endres finds that for *Jubilees*, the notion of retributive justice, that actions breed consequences, is one of the central theological tendencies.⁴⁰ It is therefore most likely that despoliation is presented in *Jubilees* as an instance of divine vengeance rather than of ‘fair wages as last’. By executing vengeance, God was re-establishing equilibrium to the universe by rectifying injustices perpetrated by Egyptians against Israel.

This is particularly enforced by a review of verse 8 above, “And the Lord did everything on account of Israel and according to his covenant which he made with Abraham that he would take vengeance upon them just as they had made them serve by force.” This verse does not specifically mention the despoliation, but it is without doubt that the author refers to the covenant of Gen 15, for this was exactly the covenant which speaks of God’s judgment upon the coming oppressors of Abraham’s descendents. And in Gen 15, judgment takes the form of plundering the possessions of the oppressors, or at least that the Israelites will come forth from the land of their oppression with many possessions. The ‘fair wages as last’ reading does not fully account for the vengeance element in the way *Jubilees* presents the despoliation. It can better be described as ‘Despoliation as Divine Vengeance.’ Thus, the description of the plundering in *Jubilees* shapes the biblical account to fit the author’s understanding of the righteous punishment brought upon the wicked during this lifetime.

It is difficult to place *Jubilees’* understanding of the despoliation as punishment into the categories laid out in Vermes or Endres. What we have is the author taking an explanation of events from one biblical passage (Gen 15:14), and applying it to another passage against the grain of the context of the second passage (Exod 12:35–36). We have ‘pure’ exegesis of Gen 15 applied to another passage as an haggadic midrash which sought to interpret the whole despoliation event in terms of the nature of divine judgment and punishment. Brooke has noted other instances in which *Jubilees* retells the story so as to combine two or more related biblical passages, and in doing so provides a fresh exegesis in light of other authoritative texts.⁴¹ While this kind of harmonization or intertextual reading is a commonplace in rabbinic literature, the point here remains that the interpretive technique in our passage has been noted elsewhere in *Jubilees*.

⁴⁰ Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 231.

⁴¹ Brooke, “Exegetical Strategies,” 49.

Noted above is the fact that *Jubilees* is quite willing to rewrite the biblical story so as to justify God by ascribing to Satan things which the Bible ascribes to God. The author could have easily said that the despoliation was the work of Mastema. Instead, he chose to describe the Accuser as the one who sought to bring slander against the Hebrews for their carrying out of the act. The writer highlights God's involvement in that which their enemies found morally troublesome, and indicates that Mastema tried to stop it but was hindered by God's angels. The absolute moral justifiability of the vengeance must have been clear and important to the writer. That someone would suggest otherwise signified a satanic challenge to the righteousness of God.

ARTAPANUS

Artapanus, a Hellenistic Jewish writer, composed *Peri Ioudaiôn* (*On the Jews*), often called an ‘historical romance,’ which is preserved in three fragments in Eusebius (*Praep. Ev.* 9:18, 9:23, 1–4, and 9:27, 1–37) with one partial parallel in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.23.154.2–3).¹ All that can be said with certainty of his date is that he lived before Alexander Polyhistor (ca. 105–30 B.C.E.), who cited Artapanus at length and who was Eusebius’ and Clement’s source. Artapanus also wrote after the translation of the LXX, which he uses as his biblical text (early 3rd cen. B.C.E.). Wacholder has argued that Artapanus’ form of non-assimilationist syncretism would be unthinkable after the Maccabean revolt.² However, religious developments in Palestine are not applicable to the Egyptian Jewish community,³ and as we shall see, syncretism is not as pervasive in Artapanus as Wacholder thought.

An earlier dating to the end of the 3rd century B.C.E. is based on the parallel (Frag. 3.20) to the efforts of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–205 B.C.E.) to promote the worship of Dionysus among Jews in Egypt (cf. 3 *Macc* 2:29–30).⁴ The conscription of Egyptian farmers (F 3.7) may also point toward the time of Philopator, who conscripted farmers prior to the battle of Raphia (217 B.C.E.). The mention of the disease elephantiasis (F 3.20) is a consideration also, since this disease was the subject of a treatise falsely ascribed to Democritus but believed to be

¹ Clement quotes a brief portion touching on Moses’ miraculous escape from the Egyptian prison which caught his eye as a parallel to Acts 12:3–17.

² B. Wacholder, “Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles,” *HTR* 61 (1968): 460, n. 34.

³ M. Goodman and E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1.523.

⁴ L. Cerfaux, “Influence des mystères sur le judaïsme alexandrin avant Philon.” *Recueil L. Cerfaux* (BETL 6; Gembloux: Duculot, 1954), 1:81–5. A.M. Denis also finds Philopator’s rule as the likely time of writing, in *Introduction aux pseudépigraphes grecs d’Ancien Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 257 and in *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 2.1146. Denis agrees his dating is uncertain were it not for the likelihood that Artapanus preceded the period of the Maccabees, since after their revolt, Artapanus’ type of syncretism is not very conceivable. However, as we have seen above (note 3), this consideration has not been deemed convincing. Denis concludes his remarks with the observation, “la compilation d’Alexandre Polyhistor est le seul *terminus ante quem* assuré.” All citations above are based on the Greek text of C. Holladay, *Fragments From Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983).

the work of Bolus of Mendes, in Egypt in the third century B.C.E. Artapanus would have had more reason to single it out when it had been recently identified.⁵ None of these clues are conclusive, and could be mere speculation,⁶ yet Collins follows Denis and Cerfaux in suggesting a date at the end of the 3rd century B.C.E. noting that this view has nothing against it.⁷

However, Artapanus mentions a temple founded by the Jews in Heliopolis in the days of Joseph (F 2.4) which may allude to the temple built in Leontopolis (established by Onias IV, ca. 167–164 B.C.E.) during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (181–145 B.C.E.). Leontopolis is located in the Heliopolite nome, making a fairly natural association.⁸ The level of confidence reflected may also point to a period of relative stability reminiscent of the reign of Ptolemy VI.⁹ Since all of the considerations regarding dates in the previous paragraph, if accepted, only require a time of writing later than the period to which they refer, and because the allusion to the Oniad Jewish temple at Leontopolis is as convincing as any other mentioned, the later period of Philometor will be assumed here for the sake of argument.

Another factor favors this date: Artapanus' writings fit well into the particular issues and stresses facing the Jews of Philometor's period. Within the Ptolemaic period, the rule of Ptolemy VI marks a major transition. Our knowledge of Egyptian Judaism prior to that time is scanty. It was marked by slow settlement in a new place. For most of this time, Jerusalem was also ruled by the Ptolemies, a condition which facilitated significant migration from Israel to Egypt. The passage of their homeland to Seleucid control in 198 B.C.E. complicated the relationship of the Jews to the Ptolemies, complexities which were exacerbated by the Maccabean revolt during the rule of Philometor. An independent state laid stronger claims on the Jewish sense of independence and identity than the Seleucid state, claims which called into question the Egyptian-Jewish commitment to the Ptolemaic government.¹⁰ It is possible that Artapanus writes, in part, to affirm the loyalty

⁵ Collins, "Artapanus," *OTP*, 2:891.

⁶ Goodman and Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:523.

⁷ J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (First Edition, New York: Crossroad, 1983), 33 and 53, n. 41–42. Unless otherwise noted, all references to this work refer to its first edition.

⁸ Holladay, *Fragments*, 230, n. 28.

⁹ Holladay, "Artapanus," *ABD*, 1:462.

¹⁰ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 60

of the Jewish people to the Ptolemaic government in spite of the new freedom enjoyed in Judea. The almost fanatical pro-Egyptian stance seen throughout could well reflect the needs of the period.¹¹

Collins writes of Artapanus' peculiar political loyalties, noting that while Moses is depicted as a benefactor of the Egyptian people, and that he was regarded by Egyptian priests as worthy of divine honors, the Egyptian king plays the role of the villain. The political message is one of hostility toward the (Greek) king and solidarity with the Egyptian people. This is an unusual posture; in most Jewish Hellenistic literature all hostilities are focused on the Egyptian people, not the Greek monarchy. "The generally positive attitude to the Egyptians makes it unlikely that there was any severe persecution in his time."¹² However, Koskenniemi sees the situation differently; the Egyptians are seen by Artapanus as simple people who, while they love Moses, misunderstand him because of their 'lower' religion. While Artapanus worships the 'Lord of the Universe,' he does not abnegate the cult of ibis and other animals because he considers it a religion good enough—for the Egyptians. Moses is thus not a polytheist in Artapanus. Artapanus tolerates the religion of the Greeks and considers Egyptian animal worship sufficient for Egyptians.¹³

The third fragment recounts the glories of Moses and the story of the exodus in the fashion of what has been called an 'adventure novel' or perhaps a 'Moses Romance.'¹⁴ Yet these titles could imply that Artapanus' primary purpose was entertainment. His work should be understood within the broader Hellenistic literary tradition that sought to legitimize one's own cultural traditions *vis-à-vis* other national traditions

¹¹ Holladay, *Theios Aner: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 218.

¹² Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 45 (Second Edition). For a study of Artapanus' interpretive alterations in Exod 2:10–15, see John M.G. Barclay, "Manipulating Moses: Exodus 2:10–15 in Egyptian Judaism and the New Testament," in *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson* (edited by Robert P. Carroll, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 31–34.

¹³ E. Koskenniemi, "Greeks, Egyptians and Jews" *JSP* 13 (2002): 31. R. Kugler has a somewhat different conception. Artapanus sought to maintain Ptolemaic anxieties about retention of status quo by adapting the Moses story both to affirm the legitimacy of Egyptian religious practice and yet to protect the exalted status of their own 'master of all the universe' ("Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt: Artapanus Accommodates the Tradition," in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, (edited by A. Hilhorst and G.H. Van Kooten, Leiden: Brill, 2005) 74 and 78.

¹⁴ Attridge, "Historiography," 166.

by presenting as positive and piquant their own sacred heroes and texts.¹⁵ While the work itself strikes many as having arisen from a humble milieu and having sub-literary value, the fact that it is not anonymous and that it is entitled *On the Jews* places it in the same literary category as Hecataeus' *On the Egyptians*, Manetho's *On the Egyptians*, and Berossus' *On the Babylonians*. This, along with its eclectic nature, places it in the literary genre of national romantic propaganda.¹⁶ Artapanus, like these others, intends to demonstrate the superiority of his race by asserting its greater antiquity and the ascendancy of its cultural contributions. Collins uses an even more apt title, 'competitive historiography,' so long as by historiography one might include a liberal component of legend and romance.¹⁷

Holladay observes that the Moses fragment divides easily into two segments: the first deals with the benefactions and achievements of Moses and second with his role in the exodus. Only in the first (3:1–20) do we see elements which could imply the deity of Moses. But these claims are indirectly and ambiguously stated. For instance, as we have seen, Artapanus does not claim that Moses was Hermes, but that the Egyptian priests made this appellation. In the second section, ὁ θεός (F. 3.21) or ὁ δεσπότης τῆς οἰκουμένης (F. 3.22) predominates in such a way as would have been able to pass any ordination test. Thus Artapanus answers in the second section any questions begged by the first. Artapanus is no heretic, but one who writes with certain scruples and restraints, with no proclivity to ascribe divinity to Moses. "Indeed, his faith is the only plausible explanation of why he attempted what he did."¹⁸ Collins softens this assertion by noting that this is the case only if faith is understood here not as fidelity to the law of Moses but as faith in the superiority of the Jewish people. The only restrictions on what Artapanus would claim are determined by what would enhance the status and glory of the Jews.¹⁹

We turn now to the three texts which relate directly or indirectly to the plundering of Egypt. Our methodological agenda will ask: 1) how does he apply this interpretation of the biblical text to his historical context, 2) how does he use previous traditional exegesis, and 3) what

¹⁵ Holladay, "Artapanus," *ABD*, 1.462.

¹⁶ Holladay, *Theios Aner*, 216.

¹⁷ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 33.

¹⁸ Holladay, *Theios Aner*, 232.

¹⁹ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 36.

is unique and common about his interpretive methods. The first reference to the despoliation is indirect and not obvious, and while its association with the despoliation may not be self-evident, it will be argued here that seeing this passage as a reference to the despoliation unlocks for us the manner in which Artapanus treats the moral difficulty we have been examining. Moses has been advised to flee having been informed by Aaron that Chenephres is plotting against his life, so he flees to Arabia (F 3.17). He is attacked en route by Chenephres' son Chanethothes, and in the struggle, Moses puts him to death.²⁰ Moses continues on into Arabia, where he lives with Raguel²¹ and marries his daughter (F 3.19). Raguel wants to wage war on the Egyptians to restore Moses and establish a throne for his daughter and son-in-law. But Moses thinks better of this and prevents him, "taking thought of his compatriots."

The next phrase is critical for our study, yet is syntactically quite difficult and has been translated variously. τὸν δὲ Ῥαγουήλον διακωλύοντα στρατεύειν τοῖς Ἀραβι προστάξει ληστεύειν τὴν Αἴγυπτον (F. 3:19b). The fundamental disagreement concerns the suggestion of Jacoby to emend διακωλύοντα to the passive διακωλυθέντα, thus, "Raguel was prevented from campaigning but ordered the Arabs to plunder Egypt." Holladay follows Jacoby, "With his proposal for an attack blocked, Raguel ordered the Arabs to plunder Egypt."²² Collins translates without the textual emendation: "Raguel ordered the Arabs to plunder Egypt, but withheld them from a full campaign,"²³ as does Mras, "At Moses' bidding, Raguel prevented his Arabs from launching a military campaign against the Egyptians, but led them in guerilla warfare instead."²⁴ The Jacoby emendation improves the reading by making clear that

²⁰ This explains the killing of the Egyptian in Exod 2:12 as self-defense.

²¹ Raguel is called Jethro in Exod 3:1. Raguel is the Greek version of the Reuel in MT Exod 2:18.

²² Holladay, *Fragments*, 216.

²³ Collins, OTP, 2.900.

²⁴ Quoted in Holladay, *Fragments*, 238. Freudenthal solves what he calls, "Der in den Ausgaben... gänzlich unverständliche Satz" by altering the punctuation, "And Moses, having prevented Raguel from launching an attack, ordered the Arabs to plunder Egypt" (*Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke* (Breslau: Grass, Barth und Comp., 1874), 157. Freudenthal seems to solve one problem by creating others. Why would Artapanus tell the Egyptians, whom he seeks to impress, that Moses himself commanded the plundering of Egypt? This would exacerbate the Egyptian opinion of the Jews.

Moses hindered Raguel from carrying out his campaign against Egypt. Yet even without the emendation it is clear from the previous verse that Raguel's decision against a full campaign was the result of Moses' efforts. In either case, Moses was the agent whose efforts saved Egypt from the full assault of the Arabians.

This theme may be in response to the charges leveled by Manetho (*Ag. Ap.* 1.241, 264, also Chaeremon in *Ag. Ap.* 1.292) that Moses invaded Egypt. Artapanus writes to counter-balance these types of charges against Jewish heroes. We have also seen that Artapanus makes the claim that Moses discourages the campaign against Egypt out of concern for his compatriots (στοχαζόμενον τῶν ὁμοφύλων). Collins believes that this refers to the Jews in Egypt, which is what one would expect, seeing that ὁμόφυλος typically refers to people of the same race or stock.²⁵ But the text specifically says, earlier in the same verse, that Raguel wished to campaign against the Egyptians, not the Jews in Egypt. That being the case, it is difficult to see how Moses could have forbidden said campaign out of concern for his Jewish compatriots, who were not in danger. What is more, if Artapanus' intent is to counteract Manetho's charge that Moses led a campaign against Egypt, why would he suddenly mention his loyalty to the Jews, calling them ὁμόφυλοι?

The word ὁμόφυλος also has a more general meaning, as 'people of the same kind.'²⁶ It is likely that Artapanus uses the word in this less specific manner thus to highlighting Moses' solidarity with Egypt, a key theme in the story as he tells it. Moses involves himself completely in the life and leadership of the empire and is the perfect Egyptian. Holladay seems to understand the passage in this way when he writes, "Even when Moses is safely removed in Arabia, his concern for the Egyptians is undiminished; he dismisses without a second thought the proposal of Raguel, his father-in-law, to invade Egypt."²⁷ This translation of the phrase (Egyptians are Moses' ὁμόφυλοι) also fits into the previously noted tendency in Artapanus to emphasize the solidarity of the Jewish people as a whole with the Egyptians. This solidarity becomes especially important if we assume that Artapanus wrote during the period of Philometor. If this is the case, it applies to its particular

²⁵ Collins, "Artapanus," *OTP*, 2:900, note c2.

²⁶ H. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1228.

²⁷ Holladay, *Theios Aner*, 227.

historical situation with the inference, “we Jews, like Moses, consider Egyptians to be our compatriots.”

It is at this point that we examine the indirect reference to the despoliation of Egypt. Collins has noted that the idea that the Arabs were permitted to plunder Egypt may reflect the biblical tradition of the despoliation of Egypt.²⁸ This claim can be substantiated in several ways, and it is argued here that it constitutes a shifting of blame for the despoliation from the Jews onto the Arabians. First, if Artapanus has Manetho’s claim that Moses invaded Egypt in mind, and is responding to that charge, then Artapanus is saying something on this order. Not only did Moses never invade Egypt, he stopped the Arabians from an invasion of Egypt, even though it could have resulted in Moses’ ascendancy to the Egyptian throne. One would imagine that Artapanus would stop there, but he goes on to tell of how the Arabians chose to plunder Egypt instead. Moses apparently stood on the sidelines and was unable to stop this plundering of Egypt. The Egyptian readers would have been left with the question, “If Moses is so great, why didn’t he also prevent the Arabs from plundering Egypt?” This is a question begged even if Artapanus is not responding to Manetho’s charge in our text. For there is some guilt-by-association; Moses prevented an invasion of Egypt but seems to allow the plundering of Egypt. What could have been advantageous to Artapanus here? Why tell a story that, in itself, raises the possibility of guilt by association in the minds of any Egyptian readers?

But if Artapanus has the Jewish despoliation of Egypt in mind, we can make sense of the risk taken. Because the Egyptians already are blaming the Jews for the despoliation, Artapanus’ risk is worth taking since it shapes a present negative into a positive with only a possible negative implication. Moses would never have commanded the plundering of Egypt since he considered the Egyptians his compatriots! The Arabians are the ones who plundered Egypt, only after Moses successfully prevented them from invading Egypt out of his civil loyalties. In other words, if the despoliation stands in the background of Artapanus’ mind as he wrote this, we can understand his motivation for taking the risk involved in telling of Moses’ association with the Arabian plundering of Egypt.

²⁸ Collins, “Artapanus,” *OTP*, 2.900, note d2.

Collins' claim is also substantiated by the manner in which Artapanus presents the actual despoliation, as we shall see and to which we turn. Artapanus recounts the story of the plagues but not in the biblical order: first (flood, not blood), second (frogs), third (lice), fourth (gadfly), sixth (boils), seventh (hail) and eighth (locusts). Finally, after having encountered such calamities, the king released the Jews. (F 3:34).

τοὺς δὲ χρησαμένους παρὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων πολλὰ μὲν ἐκπώματα,
οὐκ ὀλίγον δὲ ἱματισμόν ἄλλην τε παμπληθὴ γάζαν.

And they attained from the Egyptians not only lots of cups,
and no small amount of clothing, but also a great amount of treasure.

The alterations of the parent text (LXX Exod 12:35–36) are important perhaps more for what they excise as for what they include in altered form. There is no commandment given by God or Moses and observed by the people to ask for Egyptian possessions. There is no divine favor given to the Jews in the eyes of the Egyptians for the carrying out of God's command. The text doesn't even mention that the Hebrews asked (LXX Exod 12:35, ἤτησαν) for such treasures but only that they acquired/borrowed them. The LXX verb ἔχρησαν is shifted into an aorist middle participle so that the subject can be altered from the Egyptians (who loaned) to the Israelites (who acquired or borrowed). The LXX Exod 12:35 σκεύη ἀργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ becomes πολλὰ μὲν ἐκπώματα with *skeuē* understood as 'cups' (ἐκπώματα). Interestingly, there is no mention of gold or silver. He adds only οὐκ ὀλίγον to the Septuagint καὶ ἱματισμόν to increase the value. As if this is not impressive enough, he tacks on ἄλλην τε παμπληθὴ γάζαν. These alterations, other than the strange omission of the gold and silver, increase the value of what was taken out of Egypt and scale back the divine/mosaic/Hebrew involvement in the planning of the despoliation.

Differences of opinion have arisen as to whether this text acknowledges or covers up the plundering of Egypt. Tiede believes that there is little cover-up of the despoliation in Artapanus, and that their theft of Egypt is openly acknowledged. For this reason he doubts that Artapanus is writing a defense against anti-Semites like Manetho.²⁹ Holladay agrees with Vermes' assessment of F. 3.34–35 as a "curieux oubli dans un écrit apologetique," but not with his suggestion of 'empruntèrent'

²⁹ D. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBL Dissertation Series 1, Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1972), 175–7.

as a translation for χρησαμένους.³⁰ Holladay has noted that Artapanus' language (χρησαμένους) tones down the biblical account, since according to Exod 12:36, the Israelites 'despoiled the Egyptians' (σκυλεύω/לָשַׁב).³¹ He goes so far as to suggest the rendering, "After they had been furnished many drinking vessels by the Egyptians..." for F. 3. 34, which he notes is not very different from Josephus' apologetic in *Ant.* 2.314.³²

Perhaps it could be better said that Artapanus doesn't tone down the Septuagint language so much as use it selectively and heighten its ambiguities so as to throw into question any charges leveled at the Jews. The Septuagint reads, καὶ ἔχρησαν αὐτοῖς · καὶ ἐσκύλευσαν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους. He retains the ambiguous verb (χράω—to furnish or lend) to refer to what the Hebrews did, but not the unambiguous verb σκύλευω (to plunder). As noted, the verb χράω is ambiguous, and for Artapanus, suitably so. In the active it means here either 'furnish' or 'loan.' In the middle, as we have it here, the only meanings which would make sense contextually are 'to acquire for yourself' or 'to borrow.' In the biblical text, the verb 'plunder' in the next clause colors its meaning toward 'loan' since gifts freely given cannot be considered plunder. But with the absence of the plundering language here, Artapanus can at most have his readers understand the treasures received by the Israelites as things acquired (perhaps given?), and at least play with the ambiguous language so that the reader is left uncertain whether the treasures were given, purchased or loaned. As opposed to the biblical version, there is no clear indication here which way the story is to be read and the reader is left with the impression that the items taken were freely given.

With the association of the Jews to the despoliation severed, Artapanus can place the blame for it at the feet of the Arabians (in F 3. 19 above), as Collins intimates.³³ Instead of σκυλεύω, in F. 3:19 Artapanus uses a more forceful synonym ληστεύω. Since ληστεύω has the additional connotation 'to plunder as a pirate' or 'to carry out piratical war,' it applies better to common perceptions of the Arabians as foreign marauders.

³⁰ *Theios Aner*, 213, n. 89.

³¹ Holladay, *Fragments*, 242, n. 113 and *Theios Aner*, 213, n. 89.

³² *Theios Aner*, 213, n. 89. This translation has the disadvantage of translating a middle as if it were passive.

³³ Even if Freudenthal is correct that this passage is an echo (Nachhall) of traditions of Hyksos invasion of Egypt (*Alexander Polyhistor*, 217), Artapanus is here manipulating these 'echoes' in such a way as to pin the blame for the despoliation on the Arabians.

In making these alterations, he not only exonerates Israel by blaming the Arabians, he also makes Moses all the greater an Egyptian patriot. The plundering of Egypt was the work of the Arabians not the Jews, and were it not for Moses' concern for the Egyptian people, whom he considered compatriots, the whole country would have suffered a military invasion. While this cannot be certain, it is also supported by the fact that the verb σκύλευω is first used in reference to the despoliation in Exod 3:22 when Moses was living with Raguel/Jethro in Midian tending sheep. It has been pointed out that Artapanus associates the Midianites with the Arabians. He may have associated the despoliation with Raguel and the Arabians by sheer proximity in the biblical story. In any case, we have been illustrating just how Artapanus shapes the biblical story in the interest of what he wants to say about his particular situation in history. The Jews of Alexandria are not enemies of Egypt and neither they nor their ancestors are responsible for the despoliation of Egypt. In making this case, we have seen that indeed we are dealing with a fully apologetic text and that Artapanus' treatment of the despoliation seeks to downplay their involvement in the event and to shift the blame for it.

Several more things about this association can be stated. Arabs had long been known as nomadic groups whose presence continually threatened the stability of the larger states, and who, as marauders, could not be successfully controlled by even the larger empires of the Ancient Near East. Their presence became much better known in the Greco-Roman period than previously.³⁴ Since the Midianites were actually of Arab stock, Artapanus' claim not only has credit factually, but also has the narrative value of increasing the glory due to Moses. Collins notes that Arabia refers to the territory between the Nile and the Arabian Gulf (Strabo 17.1.21) and that Sesostris was also said to have sojourned in Arabia (Diodorus 1.53.5 and Strabo 16.4.4).³⁵ It is well-known that virtually every feature of his portrayal of Moses (other than those which arise from the Bible) has a parallel with the hero-romances circulating in Egypt about similar mythological personages. Artapanus skillfully combined these traditions, especially the Sesostris legends, so as to make Moses surpass them all.³⁶ Here also, Artapanus

³⁴ R. Smith, "Arabia," *ABD*, I:325.

³⁵ Collins, "Artapanus," *OTP*, 2:900, note z.

³⁶ M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford, 1938), 26.

may well have changed Midian into Arabia to associate Moses with this Sesostri tradition So Arabia was an attractive option for Artapanus also for its association of Moses with Sesostri.

Finally, it might be noted that Artapanus found it easy to shift blame to the Arabians, not only because of their reputation as marauders and to associate Moses with the Sesostri traditions, but because it was difficult to imagine how a group of slaves living inside Egypt could have plundered Egypt in any case. Plundering was associated with warfare, with incursion from without, or with the booty-taking of a conquering army. If anyone could have plundered Egypt, the Arabians were the ones to do it. Jews, living in complete cohabitation with the Egyptians, could not easily be conceived as Egypt's plunderers, as the tradition claimed. The plunder-language used in the biblical narrative intends to tell us, "The Jews left Egypt something like a conquering army." They didn't literally conquer Egypt, nor did Egypt suffer an incursion from the outside by the Jews. Thus when and if the Egyptians became aware of this tradition, it was easy for Artapanus to shift the blame away to the Arabians, who would have been seen as the much more likely culprits.

What happened at the Red Sea is disputed, according to Artapanus (F. 3.35), and the ambiguity of the events again works to protect the reputation of the Jews. Making use of the common literary device which drew on conflicting explanations for remarkable events,³⁷ Artapanus has the Memphites claim that Moses watched for low tide and passed on dry ground but the Heliopolitans claim that the king rushed after them with a great force, and with consecrated animals. Their reason for pursuing the escapees was,

διὰ τὸ τὴν ὑπαρξιν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τῶν Αἰγυπτίων χρησαμένους διακομίζειν.

because the Jews, having acquired the possessions of the Egyptians, were crossing the river.

Interestingly, the biblical text contains no mention of this as a reason for the pursuit of the Egyptians. Is this an indication that some Egyptians were aware of the biblical traditions of the exodus, and interpreted the pursuit according to this reason? It is hard to imagine that Artapanus would offer this fodder for anti-Semitic sentiments if it was unknown already.

³⁷ Holladay, *Fragments*, 243, n. 116.

Yet as Artapanus presents the story, the notion that the Israelites were making off with borrowed treasures is thrown into question by presenting it as only one of two traditions about the exodus. In the first tradition, Moses makes his way out of Egypt easily with no army in pursuit. In the second, the king rushes after the escaping Jews to get back the treasure they have acquired (borrowed?). Yet, with the ‘despoliation’ language removed from the exodus narrative, the reader has no reason to believe that Egypt has been plundered. Had there been a misunderstanding as to whether the treasures were given or loaned? Perhaps the Memphites are correct that the Egyptians didn’t come after them at all because the Egyptians knew they had given only gifts. Perhaps the Egyptians had simply changed their minds. By raising questions about the credibility of the story with these dueling traditions, and by excising the ‘plunder’ language from its association with Moses, Artapanus’ readers have reason to exculpate Moses (and the Egyptian Jews of the Ptolemaic period) from any blame in the matter.

What is shown here is that Artapanus’ presentation of the despoliation is indeed an apologetic defense which sought to: 1) shield from the readers any knowledge of divine or Mosaic commandment concerning, or any preparation for, the despoliation; 2) shift the blame for the plundering upon the fearsome Arabians; 3) having removed the ‘plunder’ language from association with the Jews, leave the reader unsure as to whether the things acquired were given or loaned; and 4) heighten the ambiguity about the events following the exodus, so the reader isn’t sure whether the Egyptians wanted their treasures back or not.

Artapanus seems to indicate that by his time, the Jews were being charged with wrong-doing specifically concerning the despoliation. Pompeius Trogus, the Augustan historian (*Historiae Philippicae*), proves beyond doubt that certain anti-Jewish writers of the period knew of the despoliation tradition (if indeed indirectly), and that this figured into their disputations with the Jews.³⁸ The Heliopolitan tradition that the Egyptians sought to recover their stolen goods alludes at least to a vague

³⁸ See Justinus’ Latin epitome 36.2.13. The passage is translated by Menahem Stern, “Becoming leader, accordingly, of the exiles, he [Moses] carried off by stealth the sacred utensils of the Egyptians, who, trying to recover them by force of arms, were compelled by tempests to return home (*Greek and Latin Authors*, 1.337). Our writer here believes the Jews despoliated the temple, indicating that his knowledge of the tradition was indirect. It is possible that this impression arose from the haggadic interpretation of events by which the treasures stolen from Egypt were used in the construction of the wilderness tabernacle (Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 326).

knowledge of the despoliation among the Egyptians and/or Greeks in Artapanus' day, and that some were beginning to cry foul. Artapanus is an early indication that this process was underway.³⁹ It also helps explain Artapanus' shifting the blame to the Arabians since the drastic charges being leveled required drastic interpretive measures. That Artapanus could respond as he does, essentially by shifting the blame on to the Arabians, indicates that at this point, Egyptian knowledge of the event was indirect at best. That is, if Egyptians were familiar with the septuagintal Exodus story directly, they could not be swayed by Artapanus' artful dodge. But if Egyptian knowledge was vague and indirect, Artapanus might have reasonably hoped to have relieved some of the pressure on the Jews by shifting blame on to the Arabians. Artapanus may have expected the anti-Jewish Egyptians to have too much disdain for the Jewish scriptures to examine the septuagintal version of the story. Again, in this discussion, we have sought to understand the function of Artapanus' interpretive method against the background of the period (agenda item one above).

Our final two methodological questions ask how Artapanus reflects traditional exegesis, and what is common to these exegetical traditions and what is unique to Artapanus. Interestingly, there is no indication that Artapanus added any midrashic tradition to his interpretation. However, he does treat the text by deletion similarly to others. Artapanus fails to mention God's plan and Moses' command to plunder. He also does not mention that the Jews ever asked for Egyptian treasures. He simply states that they acquired/borrowed Egyptian cups, clothing and great treasure, almost as if the events were fated and occurred

³⁹ According to Manetho (*Ag. Ap.* 1:228–251), the exodus was led by a rebel priest of Heliopolis named Osarsiph who changed his name to Moses. Having formed an alliance with the Solymites, the descendents of the Hyksos, Moses was initially victorious over Egypt which he viciously pillaged (1:249) before he was expelled by Amenophis. The specific language Manetho used of this pillaging, as it is quoted by Josephus, follows.

καὶ γὰρ οὐ μόνον πόλεις καὶ κώμας ἐνέπρησαν, οὐδὲ ἱεροσυλοῦντες οὐδὲ λυμαίνόμενοι ξόανα θεῶν ἤρκοῦντο...

Not only did they set cities and villages on fire, not only did they **pillage the temples** and mutilate the images of the gods, ... (Loeb Translation).

Manetho goes on to describe the offensive behavior of the Jews under Moses saying that they defiled their sanctuaries and slaughtered and humiliated Egyptian prophets and priests. Again, there is no indication of direct contact with the biblical description of the exodus here, yet the similarity of this version in Manetho to the relatively positive (that is, not anti-Jewish) Pompeius Trogus is striking in that both of them refer to a plundering of temples as having occurred during the exodus.

without their involvement. This is similar to *Exagoge* 162–166 and Wisdom 10:16–17 (in contrast to Jubilees 48:18 where the Jews ask for the treasures). And similar to *Exagoge* 162–166, we find in Artapanus no plunder language (cf. Wis 10:20 and *Jub.* 48:18).

It is unique to Artapanus to use ambiguity so artfully as a defense.⁴⁰ We have seen ambiguity on two levels. By removing the plunder language, with the ambiguity of the Greek verb *χράω*, we are left wondering whether the treasures taken from Egypt were given or loaned. Secondly, due to the dueling Memphis and Heliopolis traditions, we are left wondering whether or not Pharaoh marched out after the fleeing slaves in order to retrieve his lost riches or not. Also unique in comparison to all other pre-rabbinic exegetical traditions is the shifting of blame for the despoliation toward the Arabians. It remains unresolved here why Artapanus failed to mention that the treasures taken were made of silver and gold, especially in light of his exaggeration of the value of items taken from Egypt.

⁴⁰ P. Beatrice does not recognize this as a defense or justification at all. See “The Treasures of the Egyptians” *Studia Patristica* 39 (2007): 161.

EZEKIEL THE TRAGEDIAN

At some point between the latter part of the third and the start of the first century B.C.E., a Jewish poet named Ezekiel, most likely from Alexandria, wrote a tragic drama about the exodus of the Jews from Egypt called *Exagôgê* ('Leading Out') of which about 20–25% remain.¹ These fragments were excerpted from Alexander Polyhistor's *On the Jews*, and preserved by Eusebius in *Praep. Ev.* (IX 28, 2–4; 29, 5–16).² The play written by Ezekiel follows the biblical account of the exodus (Exodus 1–15—following the septuagintal text) with concessions to dramatic convention and necessity, and with additions which reflect Jewish exegetical tradition.³ His re-telling of the exodus story has elements of Jewish propaganda: the glorification of Moses (lines 68–82), the appearance of the phoenix (lines 254–end), and his omission and toning down of elements which could potentially embarrass the Jewish people in the eyes of the Greeks.⁴ Ezekiel's treatment of the despoliation of Egypt is case in point.

A brief overview of the critical issues which could impact our interpretation of Ezekiel's depiction of the despoliation of Egypt will serve as a starting point. The drama is of importance in at least two respects. First, Ezekiel's *Exagôgê*, with its extant 269 lines of iambic trimeters, is the most extensive example of the Greek dramatic literature of the Hellenistic period. Second, it is the earliest Jewish play in history, and as such provides important information as how a Hellenized Jew would try to mould biblical material into Greek dramatic forms by means of

¹ This was probably the author's real name, and not a pseudonym. The name was in use in Alexandria Egypt, although not commonly, as *Let. Aris.* 50 mentions an Ezekiel as one of the LXX translators. Ezekiel is described as a writer of tragedies by both Eusebius and Clement, but there are no fragments of any other works extant which could be attributed to him. A passage in Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 64.29.6, on the serpent, has been attributed to Ezekiel, but there is no solid basis for this attribution (Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 224). For other opinions on where Ezekiel wrote, see H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 13–17. For an opinion on a later dating, see R. Van De Water, "Moses' Exaltation: Pre-Christian?" *JSP* 21 (2000) 59–69.

² Also Clement of Alexandria in *Strom.* 1.23.155f and Pseudo-Eustathius (*Commentarius in Hexaemeron*, PG 18, 729).

³ Nickelsburg, "Bible Rewritten," 125–6.

⁴ Holladay, *Fragments*, 303.

techniques developed by Greek tragedians.⁵ Ezekiel's knowledge of the Greek classical authors, especially the tragedians, is as striking as is his close adherence to scripture. Most notable is his facility with Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus, but also Homer and Herodotus. This familiarity, along with his appropriation of Greek tragic technique, indicates that he was well-schooled in the classical tradition.⁶ J. Strugnell's assessment is that Ezekiel's metrics are competent and closest to those of the late Euripides.⁷ H. Jacobson's assessment is that his meter and prosody usage is ambiguous; in certain ways he was quite similar to his fifth-century counterparts, in other ways different.⁸

The date of Ezekiel's writing is marked off by the date for Polyhistor (sometime prior to the mid-first century B.C.E.) since he quoted Ezekiel extensively, and the publication of the Septuagint's book of Exodus (mid-third century) since Ezekiel followed it. An earlier date may be indicated by the description of the phoenix (lines 254–265) which is completely unknown in the biblical narrative, and might have been inspired by the appearance of such a bird during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (3rd century B.C.E.).⁹ In recent years, it has increasingly become the *communis opinio* that Ezekiel can be dated more specifically to the 2nd century B.C.E., probably the latter part.¹⁰ Jacobson has noted that a detailed description of the phoenix in the Latin author Manilius (end of first century B.C.E.) indicates that at the beginning of the first century, there was a heightened interest in the phoenix as a symbol of pivotal events. "A date for Ezekiel in the late second century might fit this trend."¹¹ This was a period in which a strong, confident Jewish community in Alexandria suffered strained, even hostile, relations with the native Egyptians, and enjoyed cordial but deteriorating relations with

⁵ P.W. van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist" *JJS* 34 (1983): 21–29. See van der Horst for bibliographies on editions of Alexander Polyhistor.

⁶ Holladay, *Fragments*, 303. See P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 1:708 for his knowledge of tragic and particularly Euripidean usage, though Fraser writes it is "not of high poetic quality" and shows a fairly scrupulous usage of the septuagintal text. Jacobson shows the influence of Sophocles, but especially Aeschylus (*Exagoge*, 23–28).

⁷ J. Strugnell, "Notes on the Text and Meter of Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagôgê*," *HTR* 60 (1967): 453. Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 2.

⁸ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 167.

⁹ Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:708.

¹⁰ Jacobson has made this case strongly in his excellent commentary *Exagoge*, 8–13. See also Holladay, *Fragments*, 308–312.

¹¹ Jacobson, *Exagoge* 12. See Jacobson for a complete review of the arguments for dating.

the Greeks. Ezekiel's concern to defend and commend the Jewish faith to a *Greek* audience may be designed to respond to anti-Jewish sentiments created by the Maccabean wars among Greeks outside Palestine. The need for a strong *apologia* is highlighted by the kind of Egyptian anti-Jewish polemic we see in Josephus' *Against Apion*.

The tragedy, with all its lacunae, seems to fall into the generally accepted pattern of a tragedy in five acts.¹² The fragments that remain can be divided into the following.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Act I | Scene 1—Moses' monologue |
| | Scene 2—Moses' dialogue with Sepphorah |
| Act II | Scene 1—Sepphorah's dialogue with Chus (a relative) |
| | Scene 2—Moses' dream, and Jethro's interpretation |
| Act III | Scene 1—Moses' dialogue with God, plagues and <i>Pesach</i> |
| | Scene 2—Moses' instructions to the people concerning <i>Pesach</i> |
| Act IV | —Report of the Egyptian messenger |
| Act V | —Elim, and the report of the messengers to Moses |

Did Ezekiel compose this play for a Jewish audience alone, or did he envision his audience as including Greeks and other non-Jews? The play would have an educational value for Jews of lower educational status, and for those Jews who were more highly educated, it would provide a model for how Jewish history and custom could be shaped to facilitate cordiality with their hellenistic environs. For non-Jews, the play could have been an important introduction to this history and culture of Judaism and to the greatness of Israel. Jacobson has argued that certain factors indicate that Ezekiel expected an audience to comprise both Jews and non-Jews. These include the presence of responses to anti-Jewish Exodus traditions and the fact that Ezekiel expunges biblical material from his tragedy that would appear noxious to non-Jews or would put Jews in a bad light.¹³

The primary issues with regard to Ezekiel's theology are his universalism, the question of his devotion and faithfulness to the text of scripture, and his willingness to present sacred history in a pagan context of the theater. With regard to the latter two, it is very difficult to discern the

¹² First suggested by I. Trencsényi-Waldapfel, "Une tragédie grecque à sujet biblique," *Acta Orientalia* 2 (1952): 143–63. See Robertson, in *OTP*, 2.805. Also Holladay, *Fragments*, 2:307 and Jacobson *Exagoge* 28–31.

¹³ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 17–18. All reference to circumcision, for example, has been expunged by Ezekiel from his tragedy. Our text, as we shall see, is an example of a text which responds to anti-Jewish rhetoric.

degree to which Ezekiel's willingness to alter the narrative of the biblical text or to place that narrative upon the stage indicates unorthodoxy in his beliefs.¹⁴ A certain universality of perspective can be seen in his treatment of the Passover (he fails to mention the requirement of circumcision) and in the fact that Moses' association with the law is not noted. Judaism for him, while superior, was not constituted by either distinctive markings or purity of blood-line. Moses has a dream which is interpreted by the foreigner Raguel, a feature which stand in direct opposition to the biblical custom of Jews interpreting the dreams of gentiles (Joseph and Daniel). As with Artapanus and Eupolemus, Judaism is not based primarily on the observance of the law, but differently from them, the *Exagoge* is no national romance designed to have Israel outshine its neighbors. Judaism is not considered by him to be an exclusive religion, but is open to anyone guided by the heavenly knowledge of Moses. Collins names this kind of religion 'Jewish Mystery' with the caveat that no ritual practice is necessarily implied.¹⁵

The section dealing with the despoliation comes from fragment 13 (vv 132–174), which is Act III Scene 1. God tells Moses of the coming plagues upon Egypt, of the regulations for the Passover and of the despoliation, which here is no despoliation at all. Lines 161–166 deal with the plundering of Egyptians tradition specifically.

- 161 σπουδῇ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐκβαλεῖ πρόπαντ' ὄχλον.
 ὅταν δὲ μέλλῃτ' ἀποτρέχειν, δώσω χάριν
 λαῷ, γυνή τε παρὰ γυναικὸς λήψεται
 σκεύη κόσμον τε πάνθ', ὃ ἄνθρωπος φέρει,
 χρυσόν τε καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον ἡδὲ καὶ στολὰς
 166 ἵν' ὦν ἔπραξαν μισθὸν ἀποδῶσι βροτοῖς.

In haste the king will send forth the entire group.
 Whenever the people are destined to depart,
 I will extend them favor,
 and a woman shall take from another woman,
 Vessels and clothing of every kind, whatever a person can carry,
 The gold and silver, and the garments as well,
 In order to repay those mortals for what they did.¹⁶

¹⁴ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 18–19.

¹⁵ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 225 and 230.

¹⁶ I follow here the text and translation of Holladay in *Fragments*, 380. Textual critical problems with line 166 will be discussed below.

Our methodological agenda will inquire: 1) how does our writer interpret the biblical text in making his case, and 2) how does he use and shape previous traditional exegesis, and 3) how does he apply this unique interpretation of the biblical text to his historical context. The following illustrates the relationship of the above to the Septuagint. Following the practice of Holladay, linguistic connections will be made with bolded and underlined text.

Line 161	σπουδῇ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐκβαλεῖ <u>πρόπαντ'</u> ὄχλον.
Exod 11:1	καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξαποστελεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐντεῦθεν· ὅταν δὲ ἐξαποστέλλῃ ὑμᾶς, σὺν παντὶ ἐκβαλεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐκβολῇ καὶ κατεβιάζοντο οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τὸν λαὸν σπουδῇ ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῆς γῆς
Exod 12:33	
162–163a	ὅταν δὲ μέλλῃτ' ἀποτρέχειν, δώσω χάριν λαῷ
Exod 3:21	καὶ δώσω χάριν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ ἐναντίον τῶν Αἰγυπτίων· ὅταν δὲ ἀποτρέχητε, οὐκ ἀπελεύσεσθε κενοί.
Exod 11:3	κύριος δὲ ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ
Exod 12:36	κύριος δὲ ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ
Lines 163–165	γυνή τε <u>παρὰ</u> <u>γυναικὸς</u> λήγεται σκεύη κόσμον τε πάνθ', ὃ ἄνθρωπος φέρει, <u>χρυσόν</u> τε καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον ἡδὲ καὶ στολὰς
Exod 3:22	αἰτήσῃ γυνὴ <u>παρὰ</u> <u>γείτονος</u> καὶ συσκήνου αὐτῆς σκεύη ἄργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἱματισμόν
Exod 11:2	καὶ αἰτησάτω ἕκαστος παρὰ τοῦ πλησίον καὶ γυνὴ <u>παρὰ</u> <u>τῆς πλησίον</u> σκεύη ἄργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἱματισμόν.
Exod 12:35	καὶ ἦτησαν παρὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων σκεύη ἄργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἱματισμόν

Our analysis of Ezekiel's text in its relationship to the Septuagint (question one above) will move from what is included in altered form, to what is excluded completely, to what is added. In line 161, Ezekiel possibly understood the phrase σὺν παντὶ...ἐκβολῇ together as a prepositional phrase, “with utter banishment;” an indication that no Jews would be left in Egypt (πρόπαντ' ὄχλον).¹⁷ Lines 162–3a take their wording almost directly from the source, and this inclusion is thematically important for

¹⁷ The phrase σὺν παντὶ in the LXX Exod 11:1 corresponds to the MT *kālāh* which expresses the fullness of a deed (in this case, the expulsion). It may have been read or interpreted in the Septuagint as *kol*. The words ἐκβαλεῖ...ἐκβολῇ correspond to the infinitive absolute/finite verb formation שָׁרַף שָׂרַף. Thus, σὺν παντὶ...ἐκβολῇ~| does not constitute a prepositional phrase in the LXX. Le Boulluec and Sandevorir. render it, “il vous expulsera avec tout par expulsion” (*La Bible d'Alexandrie: L'Exode*, 141).

it emphasizes that the despoliation (which is recast as a ‘fair wage’) was an act of divine providence (and therefore, by necessity, just), and took place because of the favor the Jews had in the eyes of the deity.

In LXX Exod 3:22, only the women are to plunder Egypt and it is unspecified but likely that they only borrowed goods from other Egyptian women. The Septuagint uses words that are gender non-specific (γείτονος καὶ συσκήνου), and the female possessive pronoun doesn’t tell us anything for certain about the gender of those plundered, although it implies Egyptian women. In Exod 11:2 both men and women are to be commanded to participate, and Egyptian men are also plundered. In 12:35, it is unclear if women participated at all since the Septuagint only says, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ which could but did not necessarily include the women. They are commanded to ask παρὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων (Exod 12:35), which did not necessarily include women. So the LXX (and MT for that matter) text moves from the participation of only women plundering and (likely) only women plundered (chapter 3), to the participation of both women and men plundering and plundered (chapter 11), to the participation of men and perhaps women (ch. 12).

In Lines 163b–165, Ezekiel includes the γυνή alone as the party involved in receiving the Egyptian goods. This text draws on Exod 3:22 exclusively. They receive the treasures specifically from other Egyptian women. Ezekiel changes the Septuagint’s παρὰ γείτονος καὶ συσκήνου αὐτῆς to παρὰ γυναικός making the exclusive participation of women inescapable, both giving and receiving. Also, Ezekiel doesn’t have the women ask (αἰτήσῃ in Exod 3:22) for the Egyptian goods; they simply will receive them (λήψεται). While this could be translated ‘take,’ its meaning is almost certainly ‘receive’ or ‘accept’ here, since Ezekiel is clearly trying to present the best picture possible.¹⁸

Why does Ezekiel follow the story from its version in Exodus 3, and not 11 or 12? It makes narrative sense since Fragment 13, to which

¹⁸ It is possible here that we are dealing with the principle of σχῆμα τὸ κατὰ τὸ σωπώμενον (that is, the figure of that which is passed over in silence). Oftentimes, commonly known yet unessential details of stories were understood to be left unmentioned on the assumption that the reader (or hearer in this case) will know that they are to be assumed. The phenomenon was first noted by Aristarchus who notes that details of Homer’s narrative seem to be neglected but implied by the narrative. See Adam Kamesar’s *The Narrative Aggada as Seen from the Graeco-Latin Perspective*, *JJS* 45 (1994): 58–59. This principle would apply to the Jews in the audience, but for the non-Jews, these exclusions are significant, for it changes the coloration of the story in their hearing, and in most if not all instances, this would be their primary and most direct exposure to the biblical story.

lines 162–166 belong, is a speech by God to Moses at the burning bush. Because our first prediction of the despoliation in Exodus occurs also at the burning bush, it is logical that Ezekiel fastens onto this wording. But to be more precise, this section of the speech (153–174), though delivered by God to Moses at the burning bush, is conceived of as a speech to be given verbatim to the people by Moses, and the speech draws mostly on biblical material later than the burning bush story.¹⁹ In both the section before (lines 153–160) and after (lines 167–174, the fragment's end) our section (161–166), Ezekiel details *halakhoth* concerning the Passover in a way that is similar to Exod 12:35–36, which is also preceded (Exod 12:1–28) and followed (Exod 12:42–51) with *Pesach* stipulations. The following chart tracks out all the verbal associations more closely.²⁰

Lines 152–3	Exod 12:2
Lines 154–55	Exod 12:17, 25
Lines 156–157	Exod 12:3, 6, 21
Line 158	Exod 12:7
Line 159	Exod 12:13, 23
Line 160	Exod 12:8
Lines 167–169	Exod 12:25
Lines 170–171	Exod 12:15
Lines 172–174	Exod 13:2, 12

This exercise illustrates in detailed fashion that Ezekiel has been drawing almost exclusively from Exod 12 in the context of lines 161–166, so one would expect the spoliation story to draw upon this resource. Also, as we have seen above, in line 161, Ezekiel begins his account of the despoliation drawing his wording from both Exod 11:1 and 12:33. From this point, he went back to Exod 3, and completed the story from the vantage point of the prediction delivered at the burning bush rather than from the completion of the story in Exod 11 and 12. Why? The case could be made that since he was writing from the perspective of the burning bush, he needed language that spoke of the events in the future tense (δώσω χάριν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ), not the past (κύριος δὲ ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν). Yet in chapter 11, which was open before him, the plundering has not yet taken place, and the imperative to command the people to ask their Egyptian neighbors for their treasures could have sufficed

¹⁹ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 123.

²⁰ I follow the analysis of Holladay, *Fragments*, 2:479–483.

(11:2). In fact, the context in *Exagoge* is replete with commandments concerning *Pesach*, and so the imperatives of Exod 11:2 could have fit in nicely. It is apparent that Ezekiel wanted to tell the story from the perspective of Exodus 3 even though it would have been more natural to continue drawing from Exodus 11 and 12. The key difference upon which Ezekiel capitalizes is that fact that women alone were involved in the despoliation in Exodus 3. This will be explored further below.

Continuing with our examination of what is included in altered form, we see that the biblical ἱματισμόν has been rendered κόσμον τε πάνθ' and στολάς (lines 164–165). Holladay notes that this alteration may reflect the language of the Tragedians of the classical period.²¹ The clause ὃ ἄνθρωπος φέρει reflects the words καὶ ἐπιθήσετε ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς ὑμῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς θυγατέρας ὑμῶν (LXX Exod 3:22). Holladay translates, “whatever a person can carry,” and Robertson, “things which one may carry off.”²² We see interesting adjustment here, from plural (τοὺς υἱοὺς and τὰς θυγατέρας to singular person (ἄνθρωπος). Here it is not sons and daughters who carry off the goods, but a single person per woman. Kugel claims that this specification that the items taken were portable is not designed to tell us anything about the nature of the gifts per se, but to supply another proof that the Israelites had not defrauded the Egyptians. Since the Egyptians knew that these items were easily walked off with, in giving them, they must have done so with the knowledge that these were true gifts and not loans.²³ The portability of the treasures is, however, also to be understood as a limiting factor; they only took what one person could carry by hand. Gifts in *Exagoge* are received only from Egyptian women (again, similarly but not exactly per Exod 3, but contrary to 11 and 12). Both these factors serve to make the despoliation as legitimate payment believable; who would believe the Egyptian men willingly paid the Hebrews mountains of precious items for their labors? No, the Egyptian women gave only a few handy items that could easily be carried away by one person.

With all these adjustments in view, it appears that Ezekiel presents the despoliation with a four-fold limitation; *only* women participated, they *only* received goods from Egyptian women, yet they did *not* ask for them but only accepted them, and each only took about as much

²¹ Sophocles *Tr.* 764 and Aeschylus *Pers.* 192; Holladay, *Fragments*, 2:481.

²² Holladay, *Fragments*, 2.381, Robertson, *OTP*, 2.815.

²³ Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 325, n. 12.

as a single person could carry. It was not a massive rip-off, but a controlled and reasonable event which eventuated under the guidance of providence due to Israel's good-standing with God. It is interesting to contrast this to EstR 7:13, which claims that countless donkeys were used to transport all the plunder taken from Egypt. The Targums also exaggerate the amount of treasure taken. Targum Onkelos, in Exod 12:36b, reads "and they emptied (רוקינו) Egypt."²⁴ Targum Neofiti, to the observation that Israel plundered Egypt, adds the phrase "of their property."²⁵

We move now from what was included to what was excised completely from our story. We have noted already that there is no explicit mention that God or Moses had commanded the people to ask for Egyptian treasures. Also missing from our passage is all talk of plunder (in LXX Exod 3:22 καὶ σκυλεύσετε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους) which clearly goes against Ezekiel's interpretation. The language of secrecy (κρυφῇ LXX Exod 11:2) which occupied our attention previously, is ignored. Perhaps this is simply because Ezekiel has turned to Exod 3, but more likely it is left out because, as we have seen (in the section on the Septuagint), the idea that the despoliation was planned secretly exacerbates the moral problem presented by the passage. That he left out the words οὐκ ἀπελεύσεσθε κενοί (LXX Exod 3:21) is noteworthy because it would have come right after words he was following almost verbatim (ὅταν δὲ ἀποτρέχητε). Again, the septuagintal language speaks of a full-scale plundering of Egypt, a theme he is trying to avoid.

Another omission is possible. Jacobson argues that the Passover regulations of 152–192 are intolerably repetitive; why does Ezekiel have God repeat himself again and again? For instance: the Jews are to sacrifice Pesach (157 and 179), Pharaoh will banish the people in haste (161 and 182–3), they should daub the doorposts with blood to escape death (158–9 and 185–7), they shall observe the festival for seven days without eating leaven (170f and 188–90). Why were these instructions and/or observations given twice? Jacobson claims, and others agree, that we actually have two speeches here: 152–74 and 175–92.²⁶ There

²⁴ I. Drazin, ed., *Targum Onkelos to Exodus: An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1990), 128.

²⁵ M. McNamara, ed., *Targum Neofiti I, Exodus* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1994), 51.

²⁶ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 121–3. Holladay, *Fragments*, 2.306, calls fragment 14 a speech of Moses. Also, Goodman and Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:564.

is no repetition within either of these two sections. He also notes that Eusebius' transitional *πάλιν* in 175 indicates a distinct break.

The first section (lines 152–174) is a speech of Moses to the people recited obliquely and verbatim by God (line 152: “To all the Hebrews together you will speak these words”); yet the second (175–192) is the genuine speech of Moses to the people. Lines 175–92 are not God's words to Moses, but Moses' speech to the people, expanded and developed by Moses in order to present Moses as νομοθέτης. Jacobson points out that, for the most part, this perspective holds with some understandable slips.²⁷ There is not a single slip in the second speech; every reference to the Jews is followed by the second person plural and every reference to God is in the third person.²⁸

This being the case, the theme of our passage (161–166) is not repeated in the section describing Moses' actual speech to the people. In other words, assuming Jacobson is correct, Ezekiel has God tell Moses that the despoliation will occur, but never has God command Moses to tell the people about it or never has Moses inform the people that God has planned for them to plunder Egypt. One could argue that this section of the speech may simply have been lost, since we only have at most 25% of the play. However, we would expect the plundering of Egypt to be mentioned after lines 182 or so (compare lines 182–3 to lines 161–2). So we have the right context, but no despoliation is mentioned. The biblical story clearly includes God's command to Moses to inform the people (LXX Exod 11:2 *λάλησον οὖν κρυφῇ εἰς τὰ ὄτα τοῦ λαοῦ*), and the notation that Moses had indeed done so (Exod 12:35). But by making these adjustments, Ezekiel removes Moses and the Hebrews from any involvement in the story; God simply gave favor, and they received these goods from the Egyptians according to God's providential plan, thus, downplaying any involvement the Hebrews had with the questionable events.

²⁷ In our section, *δώσω χάριν λαῷ* and *ἔπραξαν* of 162 and 166 are slips in perspective. Ezekiel should be speaking of God in the third person here and of the Hebrew people in the second person, since this is a speech given by God to Moses to be delivered verbatim to the people. Jacobson also slips in the same way, translating line 159, “so that my dread messenger will pass them by” (*Exagoge*, 61). There is no “my” in Greek, but one would expect third person (“God's”), to hold to the perspective of God's speech to be given verbatim by Moses to the people. Holladay's more literal translation is, “So the deadly angel might pass over the sign” (*Fragments*, 2:379).

²⁸ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 121–124.

The line which has interested scholars most is 166; here Ezekiel provides a justification for the despoliation which has no basis in the biblical text but which does have parallels in the traditions of the midrashic literature. We now move from question one to question two above; how does our writer make use of traditional exegesis? Or, what is common to other midrashic traditions and what is unique to *Exagoge*? The closest to any biblical justification for the ‘despoliation as fair wage’ interpretation is LXX Gen 15:14; τὸ δὲ ἔθνος, ᾧ ἐὰν δουλεύσωσιν, κρινῶ ἐγώ. While this doesn’t explicitly speak of a fair wage, it may have provided the justification for understanding God’s judgment in terms of wages for unpaid work. Yet, there are no verbal parallels to indicate that Ezekiel is specifically interpreting Gen 15:14. The connection perhaps had previously been made, and was a part of the interpretive tradition of the synagogue.

Unfortunately, a textual difficulty plagues this line particularly concerning ἡδὲ καὶ στολάς ἵν’ ὦν ἔπραξαν μισθὸν in 166 (a reading which follows two manuscripts of Eusebius).²⁹ One manuscript reads ἡδὲ στολάς ἵν’ ὦν ἔπραξαν μισθὸν and another ἡδὲ καὶ στολάς ἵν’ ὦν περ. The text has been emended variously, and Jacobson and Lanfranchi follow the emendation of Snell τε καὶ στολάς ἵνα ἀνθ’ ὦν.³⁰ But whatever the textual reading, the purpose here is to explain the failure of the Jews to return what was borrowed as payment for work done.³¹ As noted by Denis,

En passant, l’auteur justifie, en outré, ses coreligionnaires, d’une accusation plus d’une fois formulée dans la polémique antijudaïque de l’époque, à savoir l’emprunt, lors de l’exode, d’objets précieux (*Ex.*, 3, 22; 11, 2–3; 12, 35–36), sans restitution aux Égyptiens: c’est le salaire des durs travaux accomplis sans rémunération. Et il laisse dans l’ombre telle particularité, comme la circoncision, pouvant faire difficulté auprès des grecs, auxquels, peut-être, il s’adresse comme aux judéo-hellénistes.³²

²⁹ See Holladay *Fragments*, 2:380.

³⁰ Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 124 and Pierluigi Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge d’Ezéchiel le Tragique* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 229.

³¹ Lanfranchi notes that some believe the passage provides response to the anti-Jewish slanders of the day and responds, “Mais il est probable que le passage d’*Ex* 12,35–36 posait un problème éthique en soi et qu’il avait suscité une discussion toute intérieure au judaïsme” (*L’Exagoge d’Ezéchiel le Tragique*, 229). While it is clear the passage does pose an ethical problem in itself, it does seem highly likely that Ezekiel, in writing for the stage, intends to respond to public anti-Jewish slander. His argument depends in part on the ignorance of the readers concerning the details of the biblical narrative.

³² Denis, *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique*, 2:1210.

The issue of the presence of traditional exegesis in the *Exagoge* has been discussed at length by Jacobson. This passage is an oft-mentioned instance in which there are clear parallels to other later Jewish midrashic traditions.³³ The increasingly unopposed opinion in the academy is that late Midrashim made use of much older material preserved through oral traditions. Vermes has established beyond doubt that early midrashic traditions were carefully transmitted over centuries so that often late midrashic collections preserve material that is even a millennium old.³⁴

While the fact that Ezekiel drew upon earlier midrashic materials may be considered established, what we have seen here, through a detailed analysis of this one tradition, is that interpreters shape their texts and traditions differently, and the ‘fair wages’ interpretation can be nuanced in very different ways. In *Jubilees* 48, the despoliation is not so much ‘fair wages’ but ‘divine judgment against the wicked.’ The relationship between Ezekiel 161–166 to Book of Wisdom 10:16–17a is also illustrative.

She (Wisdom) entered into the soul of the servant of the Lord (Moses) and took a stand against feared kings with signs and wonders (ἐν τέρασι καὶ σημείοις). She paid (ἀπέδωκεν) the holy ones (ὁσίοις) for their labors.

We notice immediately that we have the same verb used for payment (ἀποδιδῶμι) but that is where the similarity ends. Completely different modifiers describe the Jews; ὅσιοι and δίκαιοι in Wisdom and the poetic βροτοί (mortals) in *Exagoge* 166. As we will see, while it is evident that Ps-Solomon also drew upon previous interpretive traditions, what he says fits deeply into the warp-and-woof of his message. He is seeking to bolster the faith of wavering Jews by convincing them that the despoliation of Egypt promises eschatological reward in the day of judgment.

We see nothing of this interpretive agenda in *Exagoge*. As Denis noted above, his discussion of the event is ‘en passant.’ His purpose is more transparent, more immediate, and not as deeply enmeshed in ideology.

³³ Jub 48:18, Wis 10:16–17, 20, Philo (*Moses* 1.141–2) and Sanh. 91a, and in patristic literature Theodoret *Quaestiones in Exodum* (PG 80, 249—question 23 in the critical edition of Marcos and Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoretī Cyrensis Quaestiones*, 117. See also Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 2.20.4.

³⁴ *Scripture and Tradition*, 67–126, esp. p. 95. See Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 20–23.

Ezekiel is putting the best face on a difficult situation. Because of the consistency with which the Jews sought to justify the biblical tradition of the plundering of the Egyptians, we have good reason to believe that the Egyptian non-Jews knew of this tradition, if indirectly, and used it in their complaints against their Jewish neighbors.

Of the pre-rabbinic writers, two of the three (Wis 10:17 and Jub 48:18) interpret the despoliation as a just wage. All three emphasize that it occurred in accordance with divine providence, but in Wis 10:16, it is the guidance of Sophia in the soul of the unnamed Moses which brings about the just rewards, and in Jubilees, it occurs because the angels have bound Mastema so he could not prevent it. Only Ezekiel retains the biblical language here ("I will give grace to the people" in line 163a). Ezekiel is also on common ground with the others by excising all 'plunder' language. This is an unsurprising circumstance seeing that a fair wage can hardly be considered 'plunder.' In both Ezekiel and Wisdom, the treasures taken are not requested, but in Jub 48:18 we read of the children of Israel asking for Egyptian vessels of gold and silver. Exegetical features unique to Ezekiel are the claim that only Israelite and Egyptian women participated in the event, and only portable items were taken, no more than could be carried by one person.

This brings us to our third methodological question; how does Ezekiel's interpretation fit into the broader historical context? As we stated above, it is increasingly believed that Ezekiel can be dated to the latter part of the second century B.C.E., a period in which the Jewish community of Alexandria suffered strained, even hostile, relations with Egyptians, and had cordial but deteriorating relations with the Greeks. The Maccabean wars may have created an increasingly difficult environment for the Jews of Alexandria since an independent Judea threw into question the allegiance of the Egyptian Jews to the Ptolemaic government of Egypt. This added to the continuing hatred for Jews by the native Egyptians that we see reflected in Josephus' *Against Apion*. Interestingly, there is only one hint in *Ag Ap.* (see the excursus) that these anti-Jewish Egyptians used the despoliation of Egypt as part of their harassments. Yet it is likely that there was at least indirect knowledge of it among educated anti-Semites since a version of the despoliation was known. Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus, whose *Historiae Philippicae* was preserved in summary by a certain Justin, and which contains an excursus on the Jews, (see section on 'Wisdom of Solomon') avers that the Egyptians pursued the escaping Hebrews in order to recover

their holy vessels which the Israelites allegedly had stolen during their exodus.³⁵ The fact that Artapanus has a similar tradition (F 3.35 in *OTP*) makes likely the supposition that the Egyptian anti-Semites knew about the despoliation tradition indirectly at least.

Our text seeks to answer those charges publicly, in the context of the Greek theater, by claiming something like the following. “What happened wasn’t uncontrolled pillage. Providence granted favor to our ancestors which resulted in the Egyptian women giving what constituted a ‘fair wage’ to our women. Because this was God’s providential blessing, it occurred without any begging and each Hebrew woman only took about what one person could manage to carry. What happened was not pillage but the payment of a just wage directed by divine providence.” Again, Ezekiel draws very narrow constrictions around the story; it was the result of divine providence with a view to paying a just wage for work done. It occurred with little human participation (no human asking) and it included only portable items given by Egyptian women and accepted by Hebrew women. This combination of ideas is unique to Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*. While it is clear that he drew generally from the same midrashic concept as other interpreters (‘fair wage’), he shaped these ideas in a way that was unique to himself.

With the story told in this way, Ezekiel sought not only to exonerate the Jews but to make this version of events believable. By claiming that it was primarily women involved in the event, and that the items taken were not asked for but given freely as a fair wage, any blame left is shifted from the Israelites to the Egyptian women. Perhaps we have the innuendo, “Don’t bother us about what happened. If you have a problem with it, blame your own women.” However, the limitation of “as much as one person can carry” not only makes the event easier to justify, it also answers the question, “even a woman would know not to give away all her valuables.” Ezekiel’s ready answer is, “Only portable items were given and only as much as one person could carry. These vessels and clothing were given due to the working of divine providence because of the favor the Hebrews had with their God.”

³⁵ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:336–8. See also Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles/Jews/Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman World* (trans. E. Boring, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 114–118. Perhaps Pompeius’ understanding of the items taken as “holy vessels” reflects later interpretive traditions by which the vessels taken from Egypt were used in the construction of the wilderness tabernacle. But see also Stern above and Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 126–7 for other explanations.

Another historical possibility remains; by limiting the despoliation to an act of only women, Ezekiel may seek to counter any attempt by the Egyptians seeking remuneration for lost property. A series of rabbinic texts (Tan 4:8, GenR 61:7 and BT Sanh 91a) describe Egyptians seeking just such remuneration of properties despoiled. By limiting the despoliation to only women actors, Ezekiel removes all legal witnesses from the stage.

THE BOOK OF WISDOM

The Book of Wisdom, also called the Wisdom of Solomon, is a pseudonymous literary work, commonly recognized to have been composed in Greek.¹ Due the prominence of Egypt in chapters 10–19 and its philosophical coloring, Alexandria is its most probable setting.² Wisdom (the title used here for the author is Pseudo-Solomon or Ps-Solomon, and for the book Wisdom, or ‘Wis’) falls into the genre of either Hellenistic protreptic or encomium.³ It was intended mainly for Jewish readers (as indicated by its many veiled biblical allusions) to warn of the dangers of the idolatry and to encourage them concerning the benefits of a life of wisdom; which here implies the wisdom of faithfulness to their Jewish heritage in its Hellenized variety. It was likely written after Rome’s conquest of Alexandria (30 B.C.E.) when the earlier optimism of the Alexandrian Jewish community for improving relationship with and acceptance by the Greeks had dissipated. Ps-Solomon’s withering criticism of Egypt’s heathen cults, its worship of animals and associated

¹ The differences in title reflect variance between the Greek and Latin manuscripts. Its original Greek name is Σοφία Σαλωμῶνος (spellings vary in the manuscripts) and in the Old Latin *Liber Sapientiae* (Book of Wisdom), which, because of the false ascription to Solomon in Greek, is more acceptable to modern critics. Solomon is never named, but the book clearly implies it has Solomon for its author, and contains many biblical allusions to him; cf. 9:8.

² Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 195. See also J. Reider, *The Book of Wisdom* (New York: Harper, 1957), 26–7 and Samuel Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 12.

³ Protreptic is a form of rhetorical and pedagogical exhortation in which a sage seeks to draw the readers to his position on a particular topic, and to attract students by his pedantic display of knowledge. See Goodman and Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:570. M. Gilbert follows Beauchamp in classifying the work as encomium, but points out that, in any case, both ascriptions illustrate the distance between this Greek work and anything in the Bible (“Wisdom Literature” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* [edited by M.E. Stone, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 305). Reider argues that the work should be understood as a form of midrash on the wisdom books of the Bible, with Proverbs 8 serving as his substratum (Reider, *Book of Wisdom*, 40). However, it is increasingly realized that the term ‘midrash’ was used too broadly in the past. P. Alexander has written, “such a broad usage is problematic since it runs the risk of evacuating the term of any specific meaning and reducing it to jargon,” (“Midrash,” *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* [eds. R. Coggins and J. Houlden; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990], 453). See also G. Porton, “Midrash,” *ABD*, 4:818–22.

corruptions reflects the increasing isolation of the Jewish community from the Greeks and native Egyptians who viewed their religion as absurd and their customs as barbarous.⁴

But despite its polemical nature (especially chapters 11–19), its dominant tone is accommodationist, typified by its depiction of wisdom in Greek philosophical categories. The author sees the story of Exodus as a manifestation of the working of wisdom and of cosmic (specifically Stoic) principles. For all its anti-gentile polemic, Wisdom is a confluence of Greek and Jewish wisdom. Often, the elements of pagan religion which Ps-Solomon finds so repulsive were equally repulsive to enlightened philosophers. There is here no cultural antagonism toward the entire Gentile world.⁵

Wisdom borrows the language of various books of the LXX, indicating that the *terminus a quo* is c. 200 B.C.E. A *terminus ad quem* is suggested by the allusions to it made by Paul and other New Testament writers (thus 50 C.E.). Some have recently argued for a date as late as the rule of Caligula (37–41 C.E.); observing that its vicious attack on the wicked idolaters (5:16–23) and its theory that the ruler cult arose from the desire of subjects to flatter a distant ruler (14:16–20) could be best explained as responses to the desperate historical situation of the Jewish community of Alexandria of that period. The term *kratēsis* in 6:3 may have been a technical reference to the Roman conquest of Egypt.⁶

Our verses stand at the author's beginning of his interpretation of the exodus story, which begins in 10:15. The "soul of the servant of the Lord" in 10:16 is the first reference to Moses in the work.

⁴ D. Winston, *The Book of Wisdom* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 3.

⁵ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 201–2. For a useful study of Hellenistic education and theology in *Wis*, see Martina Kepper's *Hellenistische Bildung im Buch der Weisheit: Studien zur Sprachgestalt und Theologie der Sapientia Salomonis* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1999). She has found that, while the author has been thoroughly trained in classical literature, there is "keine kommentarlos Übernahme hellenistischer Ideen." This training functions as a means to express the conceptions of the Old Testament about God and the plight of humankind (das Schicksal des Menschen) for his own time. She suggests that Hellenistic education/formation (*Bildung*) is a more efficient characterization (*leistungsfähiger*) than Hellenistic influence (204).

⁶ Winston, *Wisdom*, 20–25 and D. Winston, "Wisdom of Solomon" in *ABD* VI:122–3. Cheon in *Exodus Story*, 125ff, agrees with 38 C.E. as the best date for the work. Goodman finds this late date unconvincing, but helpful as an illustration of just how late the work could have been written (Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:573).

WISDOM 10:16–17a, 20

- ¹⁶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς ψυχὴν θεράποντος κυρίου
καὶ ἀντέστη βασιλεῦσιν φοβεροῖς ἐν τέρασι καὶ σημείοις.
^{17a} ἀπέδωκεν ὁσίοις μισθὸν κόπων αὐτῶν...
^{20a} διὰ τοῦτο δίκαιοι ἐσκύλευσαν ἀσεβεῖς
- ¹⁵ She delivered a holy people and a blameless seed
From a nation of oppressors.
- ¹⁶ She entered into the soul of the servant of the Lord (Moses)
and took a stand against feared kings with signs and wonders.
- ¹⁷ She paid the holy ones for their labors,
She guided them along a remarkable way,
And became for them a covering by day,
And a flame of stars at night.
- ¹⁸ She brought them through the Red Sea,
And led them through much water.
- ¹⁹ But their enemies she drowned,
And cast them up out of the depths of the abyss.
- ^{20a} Therefore the just plundered the unjust.

Our study will proceed in three steps. First, we will examine the text carefully in comparison to the septuagintal text to determine what is similar and what is non-biblical. Second, we will ask how it reflects traditional exegesis. Third, we will ask how this fits into the author's own interpretive purposes, and what this tells us of the historical context. Finally, we will examine what is similar and what is unique in comparison to other parallel exegetical traditions.

We begin a detailed analysis first by examining similarities to the biblical (LXX) text. Moses is not named, but is only called 'a servant of the Lord' in accordance with Ps-Solomon's common reluctance to provide any specific names from the biblical accounts (11:1–2, 14; 18:21; 19:13–14).⁷ We may have a septuagintal connection here since Moses is called **ἑρᾶπων** (θεράπων) in Exod 4:10. The phrase ἐν τέρασι καὶ σημείοις reflects language used in the LXX Exodus and Deuteronomy (Exod 7:3, 9; 11:9, 10; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 11:3; 13:2; 16:8; 28:46; 29:2; 34:11) which in the MT is **בְּאוֹתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים**. In every

⁷ Cheon's textual analysis has determined several reasons for Ps-Solomon's reluctance to use the personal names of the biblical narrative. First, Ps-Solomon was not writing a history, and thus was completely uninterested in historical characteristics of the biblical exodus narrative. Second, the historical record was, for him, a record of good and bad lives which occur in every generation (19:22). His generalization sought to universalize the story. Thirdly, he expected his audience to be thoroughly familiar with the biblical story (*Exodus Story*, 110).

instance where the words appear together in the LXX Pentateuch, the order is the opposite of what we have here; τὰ σημεῖα always precedes τὰ τέρατα. There is clear evidence that these words functioned as a hendiadys and always in the same order.⁸ That Ps-Solomon transfers the order of such a standard phrase may indicate a certain distance from the biblical text.⁹ Yet, that he uses the phrase in relation to the exodus arises from a certain awareness of the septuagintal text. We do encounter the biblical order of the phrase in his only other usage of the phrase (in Wis 8:8; σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα προγινώσκει), where its referent is not the plagues.

In LXX Exodus, the phrase is used to describe the plagues specifically (with the exception of LXX Exod 7:9), while in Deuteronomy, it is used to describe God's mighty acts of deliverance generally (LXX Deut 4:34; 11:3; 34:11) or wonders of other types (LXX Deut 13:2 and 28:46). But even in Deuteronomy, its usage often describes the plagues specifically (LXX Deut 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:2). However, here the phrase is used not in relation to the plagues, which are contrasted to the lot of the Israelites.¹⁰ It will be argued here that the phrase *with wonders and signs* in Wis 10:16 describes the plundering of Egypt (or rather, with the *just wages* interpretation of it) and that Ps-Solomon understands this payment of a *just wage* as one of the mighty wonders and telling signs of the exodus story. In fact, the despoliation, transformed into a *just wage*, is moved forward and elevated to illustrate what is in Wisdom a central principle; *Sophia rewards the righteous*. There are several reasons which warrant this interpretation.

First, the simple fact that a reference to the rewards paid to the righteous for their labors (the interpreted despoliation) is juxtaposed

⁸ In Exod 7:9; 11:9, 10, the MT only has נִפְתָּח, which the LXX translates as σημεῖον ἢ τέρας, indicating the degree to which the LXX translators understood these two words as a hendiadys, especially when they referred to the plagues of Exodus. The only instance in the LXX which agrees with the MT is Exod 7:3; τὰ σημεῖά μου καὶ τὰ τέρατα ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ with both corresponding words in Hebrew.

⁹ Cheon claims that Ps-Solomon's inattentiveness to the biblical text is one of the chief hermeneutical aspects of his work. He claims, "Though Pseudo-Solomon considers Scripture as the departing point of his biblical interpretation, he is not attentive to or interested in all the details of the text (*Exodus Story*, 109).

¹⁰ Nile turning to blood (Wis 11:1–14; contrasted to the water Israel drank from the rock); noxious insects (16:1–4, contrasted to the quails eaten in the wilderness); flies and locusts (16:4–14, contrasted to the bronze serpent); harvests ruined by hail (16:15–29, contrasted to the manna enjoyed by the wise); darkness; (17:1–18:4, contrasted to light enjoyed by Israel); death of the first-born of Egypt (18:6–25, contrasted to Israel spared).

immediately with the phrase ἐν τέρασιν καὶ σημείοις implies that the *just wages* are a primary instance of the wonders and signs characteristic of the Moses story. In order to achieve this, the despoliation, transformed as *just wages*, was moved from its biblical place at the end of the plague cycle to the beginning of the exodus story. The very first thing Ps-Solomon tells about this unnamed Moses was that Wisdom worked through him to pay back the righteous for their unpaid labors. This indicates the role this story played in the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the day which motivated such a specific response.¹¹ Secondly, after Ps-Solomon epitomizes the events of Exodus 14–15 (Wis 10:17–19), he returns to the *just wages* theme (Wis 10:20a “Therefore the just plundered the unjust”) forming an *inclusio* (Wis 10:17a–20a). Concerning this second reference, Winston points out that a tradition in Demetrius (F 5 in *OTP* which is a fragment in Eusebius’ *Praep. ev.* 9.29.16ff) and developed by Josephus (*Ant* 2:349) apparently sought to answer the question, “How did escaped slaves arm themselves for war in the desert?” by claiming that the Hebrews appropriated the arms of the dead Egyptian army at the Red Sea.¹² This tradition is likely reflected in Wis 10:20a, and that being the case, in spite of its similarity of language to LXX Exod 12:36, it may have nothing to do with that despoliation of Egypt *per se*. Even so, it is evident that Ps-Solomon also shaped this second plundering event to reflect his thesis that the righteous receive their just desserts (the *righteous* plunder the *godless* in Wisdom but not in Demetrius’ or Josephus’ telling). Therefore, Wis 10:17a and 20a form an *inclusio* with the theme, “*Sophia* rewards the just with a just wage.” Just how he understood this theme is indicated by his other textual transformations and by their contextual function.

The only other possible verbal connection to be made with the septuagintal narrative is the final phrase, and particularly, its usage of the verb *skuleuō* in 10:20a. While this could be another reference to the biblical despoliation of Egypt, as we have seen, it is more likely that

¹¹ A. Schmitt writes, “Diese anrühige Begebenheit wird in apologetischer Absicht als «Lohn ihrer Mühen» deklariert; sie war nämlich zur Zeit der Abfassung von Weish Anlass zu antijüdischer Polemik” (*Das Buch der Weisheit; Ein Kommentar* (Würzburg: Echter, 1986) 96).

¹² Winston, *Wisdom*, 221–22. The Demetrius passage reads, “Someone asked how the Israelites had weapons, since they came out unarmed. For they said that after they had gone out on a three-day journey, and made sacrifice, they would return again. It appears, therefore, that those who had not been drowned made use of the others’ arms,” (J. Hanson, “Demetrius the Chronographer,” *OTP* 2:854).

this refers to the non-biblical tradition that the Egyptian army was plundered of its weapons after their destruction at the Red Sea, and that these weapons were useful to the Hebrews as they carried out their military campaigns. For this reason we will not comment further on Wis 10:20a, other than to note again the manner in which it has been transformed to say what Ps-Solomon wants to say to the Jews of his period: Wisdom doesn't fail to pay those who serve her with righteousness. We turn now to interpretive elements which have no source in scripture, but which are brought to bear upon it. We immediately see that these far outweigh the factors which have some association with the sacred text.

The notion that Wisdom entered the heart of Moses (10:16a) has no biblical referent, other than perhaps the fact that the despoliation, along with many other biblical events, comes at the command of God (Exod 11:2) to Moses. But this fits well into Ps-Solomon's broader theme of the importance of asking God for wisdom, and of God's willingness to provide it (the theme of chapters 6–9). Moses represents one whose heart is receptive to divine wisdom. Wisdom takes an active role in chapter 10: she protected and delivered Adam (10:1), steered the ark through the flood (10:4), protected Abraham and gave him strength to follow God's command to sacrifice Isaac (10:5), rescued Lot (10:6), guided, prospered and protected Jacob (10:10–12), and delivered Joseph (10:13–14). However, wisdom is never said to enter the soul of any other than Moses. This fact may reflect both Exod 4:16 and 7:1 (passages in which Moses is 'elevated' to divine status, being called אֱלֹהִים) and the many later Moses traditions which treated Moses as semi-divine.¹³

Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh is portrayed as Wisdom's (not Moses') 'opposing' Pharaoh (10:16b; the verb ἀνθίστημι is used; literally *standing against*). This particular verb is not featured at all in the septuagintal story. More importantly, the biblical Moses only confronts one Pharaoh, but Ps-Solomon has Moses stand up against more than one dread king (βασιλεῦσιν φοβεροῖς). Winston identifies this as an allusive plural whereby one person is alluded to in the plural number.¹⁴ Enns points out a parallel passage in Sir 45:3 which reads, "By his words he performed swift miracles; the Lord glorified him in the pres-

¹³ P. Enns, *Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15–21 and 19:1–9* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁴ Winston, *Wisdoms*, 219.

ence of kings (NRSV).” Enns claims that both the *Sirach* and *Wisdom* readings are based upon Psalms 105 (LXX 104):30 in which the frogs of the plague “went up to the bedrooms of *their kings*.”¹⁵ This is for Enns indication of Ps-Solomon’s care to expound the biblical text and of Wisdom literature seeking a biblical basis.¹⁶ However, if this is the direct biblical allusion, it is hard to imagine how these kings, themselves humiliated and horrified by hordes of frogs in their bedrooms, could be understood as ‘dread.’¹⁷ Cheon argues that exaggeration was a key element in Ps-Solomon’s style.¹⁸ We could be dealing with here another example aimed at making Wisdom (and Moses) bigger-and-better, and thus to support his argument concerning the greatness of the wise. Since it seems unlikely that we have here any direct biblical allusion, the latter seems the better option.

That ‘Wisdom,’ not Moses, is the subject which stands up against Pharaoh (Wis 10:16b) is clear contextually since our verse here follows an extended description of the actions of divine wisdom and *sophia* is explicitly named in 10:9. This corresponds to a basic leitmotif; Wisdom coordinates everything. Wisdom also brings about the payment of the righteous (10:17a), a feature which is, of course, additional to the biblical narrative. The adjectives ὅσιος and δίκαιος are never used by the septuagintal Exodus translators for the Hebrews in a general sense. This is not the case with ἀσεβής (10:20a) which is used in LXX Exod 9:27 in Pharaoh’s confession; ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ὁ λαός μου ἀσεβεῖς. Yet, we see a clear association with the author’s broader interests, to universalize the biblical narrative into general categories; the righteous (idealized Israel) who love God and the evil (idolatrous Egyptians). Ps-Solomon reads the whole biblical narrative as a story of the benefits Wisdom pays the righteous, and the dangers of evil idolatry.

¹⁵ Enns, *Exodus Retold*, 48. Interestingly, NJPS translates this as a singular, understanding the plural as a plural of majesty. While this is likely correct, it does not remove the fact that a traditional expositor might have interpreted it as a plurality of kings if this interpretation was to their liking.

¹⁶ Enns, *Exodus Retold*, 153–4.

¹⁷ One might be able to argue for indirect biblical contact in the following way. In the traditional exegesis of the synagogue, Ps. 105 (LXX 104):30 was used to exaggerate Moses’ greatness. Ps-Solomon, unaware of the specifics of the biblical allusion, draws upon the idea that Moses (Wisdom for him) stood down kings in Egypt. But if this were the case, it is evidence of an inattentiveness on the part of our writer to specifics of the biblical text, confirming Cheon’s general approach.

¹⁸ *Exodus Story*, 114.

As we examine the last non-biblical feature of the text, we turn to our next concern; how does our text reflect traditional exegesis? The notion that the *spoliatio* was Wisdom's *μισθὸς κόπων αὐτῶν* (Wis 10:17a) is unknown to the septuagintal narrative. Enns makes the general claim that Ps-Solomon should be understood as a Wisdom proponent for whom scripture was all important, and that his interpretations are motivated by factors within the texts themselves.¹⁹ Yet, in this case, he fails to show the biblical justification for the 'just wages' interpretation. One might argue that Gen 15:14 provides a biblical support for the just wages tradition since in that case, the despoliation is just punishment for unjust oppression (justice issues at least are in play). Enns does not make this association but cites Exod 12:35–36 as the biblical motive.²⁰ This being the case, it is difficult to see any biblical justification for the 'fair wages' theory.

While this interpretation seems to have no implicit biblical association, it does have similarities (some sort of 'just wage' interpretation) to the exegesis we encounter in Philo *Moses* 1.141, *Jub 48:18*, Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* 162–66 and as we shall see, *BT Sanh.* 91a. Winston understands the 'fair wages' theme as a response to the polemical anti-Semitic literature of the period which demanded a response from the Jewish writers. He says, "These citations all clearly imply that that Israelite borrowing of gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians had been a special target of the polemical and anti-Semitic literature of the Greco-Roman age and that Jewish writers found it necessary to provide some sort of apologetical defense."²¹ We have already noted above (Artapanus) that Winston refers to a passage in Pompeius Trogus which provides a similar explanation and proves beyond doubt that certain anti-Jewish writers of the period knew of the despoliation tradition.²² Enns agrees with Winston, and adds that the more elaborate forms of this 'payment' explanation in Philo *Moses* 1.141, *Jub 48:18*, and Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* 162–66 attest to its popularity. For Enns, the terseness of this explanation also indicates its popularity in antiquity since the shorthand mention of it assumes knowledge on the part of the

¹⁹ Ibid., 154.

²⁰ Ibid., 135.

²¹ Winston, *Wisdom*, 220.

²² See Justinus' Latin epitome 36.2.13.

reader and complete familiarity on the part of the writer. It had become a part of the writer's personal understanding of the biblical event.²³

However, this emphasis on the defensive nature of this passage (aimed at rebutting specific Egyptian anti-Semitic attacks in Ps-Solomon's day), and on its dependence upon previous apologetic/midrashic traditions does not account fully for the role the passage plays in the broader thematic flow, a role which is more homiletic and hortatory than apologetic. While Ps-Solomon may be passing on traditional midrashic-like exegesis, this exegesis is in large part an internal response to his self-perception of what it meant to be a faithful Jew, of a Hellenized variety, in an unfriendly environment. The theme of the despoliation as 'fair wage' isn't simply tacked on to the work but is fully integrated into its thematic structure. We see here a form of the tradition in its early stages of development, fully integrated into the homiletic message of the book. By understanding the passage primarily in terms of apologetics and tradition, its hortatory and homiletic function in this context is overlooked.

We turn to our third question; namely, how did our interpreter apply the biblical text for his purposes? In doing so, we will answer the question just raised, namely; how did the 'fair wage' interpretation exhort the worshipper in the synagogue? We have noted that the author elevates what is something of a footnote in the canonical text to a key example of the signs and wonders by which Wisdom defeated the evil and rewarded the righteous. We shall see that our verses function on two levels; the level of the historical drama section (11:1–19:21), into which our passage provides an important segue, and on the level of the book as a whole.

In order to provide further background, I turn to Moyna McGlynn's recent study.²⁴ She points out that the book has typically been divided into three parts.

²³ Enns, *Exodus Retold*, 55. Interestingly, while Enns agrees with Winston, he points out that we still must ask whether anti-Jewish polemic was the point of origin for the tradition, or whether Exod 12:35–36 simply posed a moral difficulty within Judaism itself. He notes that neither *Jubilees* nor *Exagoge* seem to be responding to anti-Semitic polemic.

²⁴ *Divine Judgment and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

- 1.) The Book of Eschatology (1:1–6:21)
McGlynn refers to this as ‘The Apocalyptic Drama.’
- 2.) The Book of Wisdom (6:22–10:21)
McGlynn refers to as ‘The Praise-Poem to Wisdom.’
- 3.) The Book of History (11:1–19:22)
McGlynn names this ‘The Nations enter the Labyrinth.’²⁵

By focusing on Wisdom’s aetiological questions, McGlynn confirms this tripartite division, noting that these questions occur in clusters, each of which provides the structure of its section. This unit is structured around the cluster of questions at 12:12, 20. The first question considers God’s right to judge the nations and the second deals with the contrasting treatment of Israel. These questions lie in what has often in the past been considered a digression (11:15–12:27). McGlynn argues that this section is the interpretive key to the whole book, calling it ‘The Mercy Dialogue.’²⁶

The theme of *God as Creator and Judge* of those who fail to recognize God as Creator are primary themes of this Mercy Dialogue (11:15–27).²⁷ It is the failure of the Egyptians to profess God as the creator which prompts the reflection upon punishment and mercy. The punishment for this failure is the plague of senseless creatures sent against them. God as creator loves his creation, and has founded it on moral principles. Israel’s enemies had opportunity to make the same discoveries Israel made but they failed due to the corruption of idolatry.²⁸ We shall call this theme A.

Another theme in the Mercy Dialogue which relates to our topic is what McGlynn calls ‘*Little by Little*’—*Instruments of Punishment* (12:1–10). Flowing from God’s love for his creation and for all souls (11:26), God’s punishment is meted out little by little (κατ’ ὀλίγον) so as to make the unjust remember their offences so that they leave their wickedness and trust in God (12:2). Parenthetically, while Ps-Solomon typically exhibits little interest in details of the biblical text, the theme of the Mercy Dialogue is roughly equivalent to the biblical theme noted in the Introduction: God brought the plagues upon Egypt so that they could

²⁵ Ibid., 22–23.

²⁶ Ibid., 25–53.

²⁷ God as Creator (11:17, 20, 24; 12:9, 12 15, 16, 18) and the failure to recognize God as Creator (11:15; 12:2, 2, 9, 15, 17, 20–27).

²⁸ McGlynn, *Divine Judgment*, 30–39.

know that the Lord is God. While the idea of ‘little-by-little’ punishment is not biblical, the idea of divine wrath as a severe form of mercy flows directly from Exodus. We shall call this Theme B.

A third theme (for us, C) she calls *The Lesson for Israel* (12:19–22). Israel learns *philanthropia* by observing God even in his role as judge. The righteous must be merciful even in judgment (12:19, 22). God’s care and purpose in exacting judgment upon the unjust serves as warning of the attention God will pay to those who are within the covenant (12:21). The judgment of the unjust is far worse than that brought upon the righteous for their chastening (12:22), and for the righteous these tests quickly pass and bring benefit to them in the end.

We turn to Cheon for another theme at the beginning of the Mercy Dialogue: the multifaceted precision to divine retribution. The wicked are punished by those things through which they have sinned (11:16), so that sinful acts of the wicked result logically in corresponding tragic outcomes.²⁹ This for Cheon is both a theological principle and interpretive technique which guides his interpretation of the canonical narrative of the exodus. This could be called *The Poetic Nature of Divine Justice* (Theme D). Here, divine judgment is not simply the logical outcome of sin. Sins are punished in Wisdom so that the punishment ironically corresponds in some way to the crimes committed, and at the same time benefits the righteous. We read in chapter 11,

⁵ For by those things whereby their enemies were punished,
by these they in their need were benefited.

¹³ For when they heard that by their own punishments
The others were being benefited, they learned to know the Lord.³⁰

Ps-Solomon follows with a contrast between the way water worked against Egypt and for Israel. It brought punishment when the Nile turned to blood and when the Red Sea destroyed Pharaoh’s army. Water worked for Israel when the Red Sea parted before them, and when it poured from the flinty rock. Reider comments,

The meaning of this verse is clear: the Egyptians perished by water, but water relieved the Israelites’ thirst. Pseudo-Solomon is fond of putting things in this form of retaliation, as may be seen particularly in chapters 16–19. It reminds us of the Mosaic principle “an eye for an eye and a

²⁹ Cheon, *Exodus Story*, 116ff.

³⁰ Reider translation; *Book of Wisdom*, 141, 143.

tooth for a tooth.” Cf. also the Talmud Sot. 11a “they were cooked in the very same pot in which they cooked.”³¹

In these interpretive contexts, the role of the despoliation becomes clear. It is the failure of the Egyptians to recognize God as creator which leads them to false worship and brings about their punishment (Theme A). The punishment of Wisdom which brings about the payment of the just is also designed, little-by-little (Theme B), to bring the Egyptians to trust in God through gradual judgments. It provides a lesson for Israel; their judgment is a sign of what can happen to those who wander into folly (Theme C). It is also a poetic judgment; in that, the plundering that served to punish the corrupt ironically rewarded the righteous (thus Theme D).

Returning to McGlynn’s work we will consider how the despoliation functions in the broader book-wide context. Having surveyed the Mercy Dialogue as the interpretive key for the book, McGlynn returns to the Apocalyptic Drama (1:1–6:21).³² Armed with the principle that God’s judgment is enacted ‘little-by-little’ to provide maximum opportunity for repentance, we are still left with the question of how God will respond if all his merciful mini-judgments go unheeded. The Apocalypse proves that God is serious all along, and that final judgment is sure for all the wicked. Final retribution proves God’s justice, confirms the necessity of taking heed to the divine warnings along the way and supports the moral *paideia* in the here and now. Proof that the moral order will be supported is a key feature of this section.³³

In chapter six, McGlynn considers Egypt’s judgment and the transcendent nature of God in 11:4–14 and 16:1–19:22. The exodus narrative is read with eschatological interests, as the lens through which the author interpreted the final judgment. In Wisdom chapter 10, those individuals singled out for mention constitute a blueprint for salvation. They make up Israel and her history, but their salvation from adverse circumstances speaks of a wider plan in which those who respond to God’s wisdom are granted the former glory of Adam; i.e. the immortality which was built into the creation plan of God for all humankind. Israel is recast as the new Adam who will inherit immortality. God’s judgment upon

³¹ Ibid., 140.

³² Pages 52–3 summarize how the Mercy Dialogue functions as the interpretive key, not only for the exodus story, but for the whole book.

³³ McGlynn, *Divine Judgment*, 54–56.

Egypt at the Red Sea is indicative not only of an earthly rescue from destruction but of the promise of the eschaton. "In our reading, then, of Wisdom's interpretation of the Exodus event, we should recognize that the familiar cycle of Exodus incidents is adapted in terms of the imagination and aspiration surrounding an ultimate judgment or vindication."³⁴

Thus, at the book level, the exodus narrative plays the role of eschatological proof. Since one cannot look at present events to see proof that God stands behind his moral law (since the righteous suffer), one must look to the eschaton when the righteous will be rewarded with immortality and creation itself will war against the souls of the wicked (The Eschatological Drama). But how can one be sure that this will indeed happen? God has already done something like this before, when he brought judgment against Egypt. M. Gilbert agrees.

It follows that when the author affirms in the introduction that God will use the forces of the universe as weapons at his 'visitation' (5:17–23), his faith can be justified by pointing to the fact that this happened already in the events by which Israel was founded. The last verse of the book (19:22) is there to say that what has happened will always be happening again, no matter where and no matter how. The events of the exodus confirm the author's hope and view of the last things, as they also strengthen the wish for wisdom he evokes in his readers.³⁵

How does the despoliation fit into this picture? It speaks of God's final vindication of the just, and his judgment against the wicked. Just as the wealth of the wicked was despoiled and these riches were transferred into the hands of the righteous as reward for their wisdom, so in the eschaton, the evil will be stripped of their prized immortality which will be given to the righteous. The riches and pride of the wicked in judgment will pass away as a shadow (5:8–9), but the righteous will be treated to royal splendor (5:15–16). As proof, the author presents the reader with the despoliation as an indication that God has already in one instance done exactly that. Placing it where he does, in his segue into the Historical Drama, he heightens its interpretive import, relating it to the central themes of the book as a whole.

Thus, by examining the context of Wis 10:17 and 20, it appears that the writer isn't simply rehearsing well-known interpretations to

³⁴ Ibid., 174.

³⁵ "Wisdom Literature," 310.

justify God in the face of anti-Semitic attacks. He is seeking to bolster the faith of the wavering Jew by convincing them that the despoliation of Egypt promises eschatological reward in the day of judgment. The message is something like the following. “You may be tempted to live the life of an Epicurean, but if you do so you will lose your reward of immortality in the end. If you follow wisdom and virtue, if you continue to live according to our faith, just as God rewarded our ancestors by plundering Egypt, you will also receive a reward for your toils when your soul enters immortality.”

Our final question concerned what is unique to this exegesis, and what is common to other exegetical traditions of the period. Our text shares the contention that the despoliation was a fair wage with several other interpreters explored here; Philo *Moses* 1.141, *Jub* 48:18, and Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge* 162–66 and several rabbinic texts, mainly BT Sanh 91a. Yet, Ps-Solomon interprets it uniquely. The elevation Ps-Solomon brings to bear on this event (as a central feature in the deliverance of Israel, and as an illustration of the benefit of wisdom and the folly of idolatry) is unique to this work. It is unique, and strikingly biblical, that our writer used the passage as an indication of God’s severe mercy. In the Introduction, we have seen that the biblical narrative understands the whole plague narrative as a severe mercy which allowed Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and all the world, opportunity to know that “Yahweh is God.” However, Ps-Solomon’s understanding of the ‘little-by-little’ nature of judgment, so as to provide maximum opportunity for the evil to repent, is not necessarily biblical or reflected in traditional midrashim concerning the despoliation. The role of Wisdom, as the genius behind the payment is unique. Also unique is the use of the passage as eschatological proof of the surety of God’s judgment on the wicked, which has no parallel in traditional exegesis.

Let us conclude with the observation that in answering the question of the relationship of our text to traditional exegesis, we have learned that the interpretation of Ps-Solomon is not so much defensive as hortatory. Our passage transmits traditional exegesis; Ps-Solomon drew on other known exegetical traditions and developed them uniquely. In any case, the purpose of this study has been to show the internal logic of its usage here and the manner in which Ps-Solomon draws upon it to encourage the faithful.

The results of this study provide some insight into the tension between two recent studies of the exegetical methods of Ps-Solomon: those of Cheon and Enns. Cheon views the writer as ‘inattentive’ to the biblical

text, shaping it heavily to suit the needs of his audience. Enns sees the writer as a true exegete who was motivated by factors within the texts themselves. He is at the same time a conduit for preexisting interpretive traditions. Leslie Hoppe has noted that the difference between these two approaches show that more study of Ps-Solomon's relationship to the biblical story and to early Jewish interpretive traditions is necessary.³⁶ This essay has illustrated both approaches. On one hand, the writer is strangely inattentive to the biblical text *qua* text. We saw very little actual language of the septuagintal despoliation story reflected here (one word!), and the common phrase which he retained from the broader context had confused the normal biblical word order ('wonders and signs,' instead of 'signs and wonders'). On the other hand, we have encountered a certain sensitivity to the biblical narrative on the thematic level. He exploits the biblical theme of the severe mercy of God at work in the tragedies brought on Egypt in a rather unique manner. As we have noted, even here he shaped this theme heavily for his purposes (God's little-by-little punishment, etc.), but his usage of such an important biblical motif is remarkable, and illustrates a more careful reading of the biblical story than might otherwise be supposed. From this study, it appears that the writer is insensitive to the septuagintal narrative in its textual details, but not in terms of its broader themes.

³⁶ L. Hoppe, review of S. Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation*. and P. Enns, *Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15-21 and 19:1-9*, CBQ 61 (2001): 114-115.

PHILO'S LIFE OF MOSES

Philo's œuvre can be divided into three genre categories; the *Quaestiones*, the *Legum Allegoriae* (or *Allegorical Commentaries*), and the *Exposition of the Law*. Philo's treatment of the despoliation occurs in two different passages. One is a literal treatment from the *Exposition*, and the other, from the *Allegorical Commentaries*, transforms Gen 15:14 into an allegory of the soul. Opinions vary widely about the chronological relationship between the *Exposition* and the *Allegorical Commentary*, and we will here consider the *Exposition* pericope first.¹ The *Exposition* is a systematic presentation of the Mosaic legislation which is in the main non-allegorical. Philo intends to clarify the value and significance of Moses as legislator for possibly a wider readership than the *Allegorical Commentary*.²

As one might expect, Philo's rather exhaustive treatment of the life of Moses in *On the Life of Moses* touches on the despoliation of Egypt (1:140–142). It was the view of Erwin Goodenough that *Moses* was written for Gentiles as not only an apologetic tract, but an evangelistic one.³ However, there is little evidence that non-Jews of Philo's period read any Jewish writings (whether the Septuagint or Philo), a fact that makes Goodenough's theory less believable. A much more tenable perspective is that *The Exposition* was written with a view to convince Jews who were preparing to abandon their Judaism to remain faithful. This difference strikes a very similar tone as an overtly conversion-seeking work.⁴ Peder Borgen explains, "Philo's purpose in writing the *Life of Moses* is to show the divine calling of Moses and the Jewish people to worship God, keep the Sabbath and serve the whole world. Philo expects that the new (eschatological) era will come when all nations cast aside their ancestral customs and honor the laws of Moses alone (2.43–44). Thus the book was written to tell Gentile readers about the

¹ On opinions concerning the chronology, see J. Morris, "The Jewish Philosopher Philo" in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (revised by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman, Edinburgh: Clark, 1987), 3.2:842.

² *Ibid.*, 840.

³ "Philo's Exposition of the Law and His De Vita Mosis," *HTR* 27 (1933): 109–25.

⁴ S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 47.

supreme law-giver whose laws they are to accept and honor. It was also to strengthen the Jews for their universal role.”⁵

The treatise *Moses* is divided into two distinct parts. *Moses I*, as Philo specifically states, is a rather straightforward retelling of the biblical narrative, and is mostly free of allegory. Philo recasts the story with both significant additions and deletions, and as he himself points out, draws upon *haggadic* traditions in doing so.⁶ He also develops the inner psyche of characters, exploring their thoughts and feelings, filling out the rather laconic nature of the original story. Philo has presented us here with something other than a traditional commentary on the biblical story but a highly independent version which has been provoked by the versions of the Moses story which Gager calls “revenge in the form of exodus narratives” written from an Egyptian point of view.⁷

It should be noted that Philo’s God assures Moses that he will lead the people out of Egypt to another home (71) and later commands Moses to ask Pharaoh for freedom to journey three days into the wilderness to sacrifice. This tension flows from the very nature of the biblical text—the tension between Exod 3:8 and 18. Yet it is surprising that Philo did not (as we shall see in Josephus) relieve the tension by eliminating the embarrassing “three days journey into the wilderness” element from his telling. This apparent ruse plays directly into the unseemliness of the story since God appears to command Moses to deceive the Egyptians in order to facilitate their plundering. Philo even accentuates the trickery when, in paragraph 87, he describes Moses and the elders emboldened to ask the king for permission to leave the boundaries of Egypt for sacrifice since “their ancestral sacrifices must be performed in the desert, as they did not conform with those of the

⁵ “Philo of Alexandria,” *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 235. For a different position, see Conzelmann, *Gentiles Jews Christians*, 139–233.

⁶ “I will . . . tell the story of Moses as I have learned it, both from the sacred books . . . and from some of the elders of the nation; for I always interwove what I was told with what I read, and thus believed myself to have a closer knowledge than others of his life’s history” (*Moses* 1.4—I use in all the following the translation of F. Colson in *LCL*, *Philo IV*). Little actual narrative haggadah is found in Philo, although in our passage we have a brief encounter with it. For an explanation for its actual paucity in Philo, see Adam Kamesar, “Philo, *Grammatikē*, and the Narrative Aggada” in *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (eds. J. Reeves and J. Kampen, Sheffield: 1984), 216–242.

⁷ J. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 113.

rest of mankind, but so exceptional were the customs peculiar to the Hebrews that their rule and method of sacrifices ran counter to the common course.”⁸

Yet in just the previous paragraph, Philo describes Moses and Aaron informing the elders of their nation secretly of God's promise to achieve liberty and a homeland on their behalf. The biblical tension—God commands Moses not to lead Israel from Egypt, but only to ask for time to offer sacrifices in the desert—is not only unresolved in Philo, it is accentuated, a fact which sits uncomfortably with the perfection of Moses and the people described above. Because of the moral superiority of the nation, the wickedness of the Egyptians, and the horrors of the oppression, this trickery is justifiable.⁹ This accentuation of the trickery of the event is strikingly uncharacteristic of the interpretive method of other pre-rabbinic writers, but reminiscent of what we saw in our study of the Septuagint Exod. 11:2 and its addition κρυφῇ.

After Philo's description of the plagues, the reader is introduced to the theme of the despoliation of Egypt. In paragraph 139, after describing Pharaoh's unusual self-will, and the manner in which his incorrigibility brought suffering on all the people, the people exhorted each other to quickly drive the Hebrews out of their country, believing that a day's delay would bring about deadly vengeance. Paragraph 140–42,

The Hebrews, thus hunted as outcasts from the land, and conscious of their own high lineage (τῆς αὐτῶν εὐγενείας εἰς ἔννοιαν ἐλθόντες), were emboldened to act as was natural to them, as freemen and men who

⁸ This is dependent upon Exod 8:22, where Moses replies to Pharaoh's suggestion that the Jews carry out their sacrifices to their god within the boundaries of Egypt, “It would not be right to do this, for what we sacrifice to the LORD our God is untouchable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us? (NJPS)”. D. Sills claims that Philo's interpretation recognizes the legitimacy of the Egyptian cult, yet he maintains the sacred quality of Jewish worship, (“Vicious Rumors: Mosaic Narratives in First Century Alexandria,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1992 Seminar Papers* [E. Lovering, Jr. ed., SBLSPS 31, Atlanta 1992]: 690). This seems to go against Philo's tendency generally to portray Egyptian worship and character in the darkest terms possible. Sills' own thesis here is that Philo's presentation of Moses in *Moses* provides rationale for scripture's hostile view of the Egyptians. Why would scripture be hostile to the Egyptians if their cult had some legitimacy?

⁹ If Philo's audience here was not the pagan outsider but the Hellenized Jew of the Diaspora whose commitment to Judaism was shaky and who needed convincing that Judaism was commensurate with Hellenism (Victor Tcherikover, “Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered,” *EOS* 48 [1956] 169–193), we may be dealing here with an insider's joke which communicates the superiority of the under-dog.

were not oblivious of the injustices which malice had inflicted on them (ὅποῖον εἰκὸς ἦν τοὺς ἐλευθέρους καὶ μὴ ἀμνήμονας ὧν ἐπεβουλεύθησαν ἀδίκως);¹⁴¹ for they took out with them much spoil (πολλὴν γὰρ λείαν ἐκφορήσαντες), which they carried partly on their backs, partly laid on their beasts of burden. And they did this not in avarice (οὐ διὰ φιλοχρηματίαν), or, as their accusers might say, in covetousness of what belonged to others (τὴν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων ἐπιθυμίαν). No, indeed. In the first place, they were but receiving a bare wage for all their time of service (ὧν παρὰ πάντα τὸν χρόνον ὑπηρετήσαν ἀναγκαῖον μισθὸν κομιζόμενοι); secondly, they were retaliating, not on an equal but on a lesser scale, for their enslavement (ὕπὲρ ὧν κατεδουλώθησαν ἐν ἐλάττωσι καὶ οὐχὶ τοῖς ἴσοις ἀντιλυπούντες). For what resemblance is there between forfeiture of money and deprivation of liberty, for which men of sense are willing to sacrifice not only their substance but their life?¹⁴² In either case, their action was right, whether one regard it as an act of peace, the acceptance of payment long kept back through reluctance to pay what was due (εἴθ' ὥς ἐν εἰρήνῃ μισθὸν λαμβάνοντες, ὃν παρ' ἀκόντων πολλὸν χρόνον οὐκ ἀποδιδόντων ἀπεστεροῦντο), or as an act of war, the claim under the law of the victors to take their enemies' goods (εἴθ' ἐν πολέμῳ τὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν φέρειν ἀξιούντες νόμῳ τῶν κεκρατηκότων). For the Egyptians began the wrongdoing by reducing guests and suppliants to slavery like captives, as I said before (οἱ μὲν γὰρ χειρῶν ἦρξαν ἀδίκων, ξένους καὶ ἱκέτας, ὥς ἔφην πρότερον, καταδουλωσάμενοι τρόπον αἰχμαλώτων). The Hebrews, when the opportunity came, avenged themselves without warlike preparations, shielded by justice whose arm was extended to defend them (προσσιζόντος καὶ τὴν χειρὰ ὑπερέχοντος τοῦ δικαίου).

Our first methodological question remains: How does our exegete balance between biblical text and cultural context? How does he apply the text to life yet stay rooted in the biblical meaning? Philo begins with and builds upon the biblical fact that their ancestors went down to Egypt as free people which he transforms into the philosophical notion that they were free by nature because of their moral superiority as a nation. Neither the word ἐλεύθερος nor εὐγενεία (or any of their cognates) are used in the septuagintal exodus narrative to describe the nation as a whole. The notion that the Jews are well-born freemen is key to the manner in which Philo treats this passage; because their enslavement was an egregious offense of nature, their massive plundering was natural and reasonable. Philo's repeated emphasis on the high lineage and freeborn status of the Mosaic people counters the ubiquitous slur that the Jews were base by nature and thus worthy of slavery. Attitudes such as that reflected in Tacitus, that the Assyrians, Medes and Persians regarded the Jews as the meanest of all their subjects (*despectissima pars*

servientium) are in view.¹⁰ But perhaps most pertinent is the brief comment by Cicero that Jews were born to be slaves.¹¹

In Philo's tractate *Every Good Man is Free*, he advances the Stoic view on slavery; it is not a corporeal condition but a psychic condition which occurs whenever the soul becomes addicted to the passions. For instance, in ¶ 10, he speaks of slavery as the real condition of some well-born and freedom as the real condition of some slaves. The virtuous sage (and as we shall see, Philo depicts the whole community of Israel as virtuous philosophers) is necessarily free. Yet he allows for the possibility that Aristotle's view has some value: some people are indeed slaves by nature. There are, in the end, two categories of slavery in Philo's estimation; corporeal and moral (*Good Person*, 17). Bodily slavery is an accident of history and there are no persons born slaves by nature. Psychic or moral slavery is that of the soul overwhelmed by the passions. Since this condition can be ordained by God, enslavement—moral slaves made into actual slaves—is reasonable. As Garnsey says, "Philo goes on to urge that moral slaves should be subjected to institutional slavery, because they need to be controlled, in their own and in everyone else's interest."¹² Thus, only the bad should be enslaved and since the Hebrews are the best of people, their enslavement was the worst of offenses.

The superiority of Israel has already been mentioned above, and is a fundamental theme in Philo. In *Heir* 78–85 Philo interprets the name 'Israel' as the one who "sees God" with the eyes of the soul. In *Abr.* 57, the name 'Israel,' which he interprets to signify, "He who sees God," illustrates the exalted position of the Israelites. Philo understands this vision to be a mental perception or the sight of understanding. This transforms Israel into a class of philosophers, at least those among them who are more sophisticated and do not traffic in impiety.¹³ By

¹⁰ *Historiae* 5.6–8 from the "Excursus on the Jews." See Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles Jews Christians*, 131. Tacitus also, in the same passage, claims that King Antiochus tried to abolish Jewish superstition and introduce Greek civilization but was distracted by a war with the Parthians which prevented him from improving this basest of people.

¹¹ *Iudaeis et Syris, nationibus natis servituti* (*De prov. cons.* 5:10). This is all Cicero has to say on this topic. See also Conzelmann, *Gentiles Jews and Christians*, 109–110 and Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, no. 70.

¹² P. Garnsey, "Philo Judaeus and Slavery Theory," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994): 42.

¹³ E. Birnbaum notes that 'Israel' may not always exactly correlate to the biblical Hebrews since "these subjects belong to a more sophisticated kind of Judaism" (*The*

transforming the original free status of his ancestors into well-born freemen (thus, free by nature), he both counters the slander that the Jews are by nature despicable and fit for slavery and justifies the despoliation. This status of well-born freemen emboldened them—due to their well warranted outrage—to participate in the despoliation being acutely aware of the indignities suffered. The Jews were acting rightly in plundering Egypt as it was in accordance with their nature.

This notion of the rightness of the plundering of Egypt may well stem from Philo's ethical Stoicism. Man is not responsible for his environment but for his response to it. For the Stoics, what makes an action right is the inner attitudes and the state of mind of the moral agent.¹⁴ Intentionality is everything, and because the sage possesses a perfectly harmonized *logos*, he can only perform perfect actions which contain all the factors of virtue. A silly person can do the same things, but because their actions do not flow from a harmonized *logos*, they are not in accordance with virtue. Stoics called a correct action *κατόρθωμα* the virtue of which could only be judged by its point of departure; what is important is not the deed itself but the interior spiritual disposition of the agent. One cannot easily judge whether a behavior is correct or incorrect since an action can be extrinsically similar to a *κατόρθωμα* but in fact be a silly mistake since it flows from an incorrect disposition.¹⁵

These Stoic categories, it is here suggested, are helpful for understanding Philo's line of argumentation and are central to the manner in which he makes his case. According to the ethics of the Stoa, human actions can be divided into three categories: correct or virtuous action

Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews and Proselytes [Brown Judaic Studies 290, Studia Philonica Monographs 2, Atlanta 1996], 123). Especially instructive in this light is Burton L. Mack's "Moses on the Mountain Top: A Philonic View" in *The School of Moses: Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion in Memory of Horst R. Moehring* (ed. by John Peter Kenney, Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1995), 16–28. Moses' vision of God is both an example of the vision all Jews can experience as 'Sons of God' and that which underlies Moses' prophetic knowledge which was codified into writing. The books of Moses born of this vision were "well-written" so that they not only tell the story of Israel's vision of God, but through artful unpackaging the story in detail, the reader (with the help of Philo the exegete), can also see the *logos*-vision first and most clearly seen by Moses. "Seeing the *logos*, imitating the exemplars of vision, and receiving Philo's instructions on the meaning of the text were all ways of taking one's place among the sons of Israel, the nation that sees God" (p. 25).

¹⁴ A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (2nd Edition, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 183.

¹⁵ G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: III. The Systems of the Hellenistic Age* (trans. John Catan, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 275–77.

(κατόρθωμα) and vicious action or a mistake (ἀμάρτημα). Between these two we find a category called *intermediate actions* which the Stoics tried to determine with a great deal of precision. Intermediate actions are subdivided into three categories, only one of which concerns us—those actions that have value as ‘suitable’ (καθήκον or *officium*). It is often rendered ‘duty.’ While an ordinary man can never act according to reason and thus his actions are never a κατόρθωμα, a normal man can perform the ‘suitable action’ as can the sage, although for the sage, because his actions include wisdom and cohere with nature, these actions coincide with correct action or κατόρθωμα.¹⁶ Diogenes Laertius claims Zeno was the first to use this term and describes the καθήκον as follows.

Furthermore, the term Duty is applied to that for which, when done, *a reasonable defense can be adduced, e.g.* harmony in the tenor of life’s process, which indeed pervades the growth of plants and animals. For even in plants and animals, they hold, you may discern fitness of behavior... And it is an action in itself *adapted to nature’s arrangements*.¹⁷

Both Reale and R.D. Hicks point out the unfortunate English translation of the term ‘duty’ for καθήκον because of its application in this case to plants and animals.¹⁸ Reale suggests ‘suitable’ as a better translation noting that for Zeno, even plants must comply with the requirements of nature and are thus in a sense ‘suitable’ to their environment.¹⁹

Reale also points out that human laws and conventions, for the Stoics, are expressions of “an eternal and indestructible law which comes from the eternal *logos*.”²⁰ In other words, for the Stoics, human laws and conventions are not to be flouted (as the Epicureans and Cynics might have it) but respected as visible expressions of the rational mind of the universe by which the sage must guide their life. Thus, an action that is ‘suitable’ is reasonable according to human laws and conventions. When it has also been performed by a sage with the correct interior disposition—one which coheres to the cosmic *logos*—the καθήκον then coincides with a κατόρθωμα.

To be argued here is the contention that, for Philo, the despoliation of Egypt was not only a καθήκον, but that it also constituted a

¹⁶ Ibid., 277–281. See Cicero *De finibus* 3.17.58 for the claim that the sage can perform actions in the ‘neutral’ realm.

¹⁷ Diogenes Laertius 7.107–8 (*LCL* 2.213–215).

¹⁸ Reale, *The Systems*, 278 and Hicks in *Diogenes Laertius* in *LCL* 2.212.

¹⁹ Reale, *The Systems*, 278.

²⁰ Ibid., 280.

κατόρθωμα.²¹ Philo insists that the despoliation was an event for which a *reasonable defense can be adduced*; that is, the despoliation was reasonable according to human conventions (thus, a καθήκον). To continue to use Diogenes' words, it was "adapted to nature's arrangements." This was the case, argues Philo, whether it is understood as an act of peace or an act of war (*Moses* 1:142). Because it was performed by persons who were high-born and motivated by the correct intentions and because it followed social convention, their action while a καθήκον, coincides with a κατόρθωμα.

If this is a correct interpretation, it is the central thread of Philo's argument as it here unfolds. While Philo doesn't use the Stoic technical nomenclature in direct association with the despoliation, both terms are used in *Heir* with their full Stoic sense (καθήκον in 191 and κατόρθωμα in 297) and especially κατόρθωμα is not infrequently used elsewhere in its full Stoic sense.²² This interpretation may also solve the oddity noted above; namely, that Philo seems to place side by side the biblical traditions that the Hebrews intended to leave Egypt for good but only asked Pharaoh for the opportunity to sacrifice in the wilderness. While this may have appeared to be trickery, it was in fact a καθήκον which, because it arose from pure intentions, coincided with a κατόρθωμα.

In the phrase πολλήν λείαν ἐκφορήσαντες Philo uses the more typical language for spoil thus avoiding the septuagintal term σκυλεύω (*LXX* Exod 3:22 and 12:36) which has in classical literature referred to the stripping of a defeated enemy *only* of arms and armor (see excursus). To have stripped the defeated foes of other than arms and armor would not have been suitable in terms of human convention. Interestingly, Philo makes no designation of exactly what was taken from Egypt (no mention of "vessels of gold, silver and clothing). Here, in contrast to Ezekiel the Tragedian (who, in line 164 seeks to limit the amount taken from Egypt—see previous chapter) and similarly to EstR 7:13, he adds that beasts of burden were used to carry out all of the items taken from Egypt and so accentuates the vastness of material taken from Egypt.

²¹ It has been argued by Pohlenz that this concept has been imported from Semitic "You should" language. Kilb agrees with Pohlenz that the idea has been imported to Stoicism, but that it was imported "vom Peripatos grundgelegten Verschmelzungsprozess von Naturwissenschaft und Ethik, ein Prozess, der gerade in der Stoa zum Austrage kam" (G. Kilb, *Ethische Grundbegriffe der alten Stoa* [Freiburg: Herder, 1939], repr. in *Greek & Roman Philosophy: Stoicism* [ed. Leonardo Tarán, New York: Garland, 1987], 44).

²² *Alleg. Interp.* 1.56, 64, 93, 97; *Alleg. Interp.* 3. 126, 188; *Sacrifices* 73; *Posterity* 11, 72; *God* 72; *Planting* 135; *Migration* 54; *Flight* 193; *Names* 236; *Dreams* 2.198; *Abraham* 186, 235; *Moses* 1.313; *Spec. Laws* 1.245; *Spec. Laws* 4.193; *Virtues* 25; *Rewards* 12, 16; *Good Person* 60.

This interpretation does two things. It clarifies that we are dealing with legitimate plundering of a victorious army (by using *λεία* instead of *σκυλεύω*)—something he explicitly points out below—and accentuates the quantity of what was plundered (*πολλήν λείαν* was carried out of Egypt with the assistance of beasts of burden) without particularizing what exactly was taken. There may be here some unseemly connotations associated with the taking of clothing (again, see excursus). In this context, Philo's motivation to exaggerate the quantity of items despoiled from Egypt seeks to highlight Israel's greatness; so great was the injustice done by this illicit enslavement of those well-born and free by nature that a small reward would never reasonably compensate. The greatness of the despoliation declares the greatness of Israel.

Philo claims this booty was not taken on account of Jewish avarice or covetousness for the belongings of others, but that it represented a bare minimum wage for their years of service. He specifically mentions that others claim the despoliation of Egypt occurred due to Jewish greed. Here he responds to the generally accepted understanding of Moses and the Jews (mentioned above) that they were misanthropes whose hatred for their non-Jewish neighbors resulted in the plundering of Egyptian holy places and the pillaging of their cities.²³ Lysimachus even claims that Jerusalem was originally called 'Hierosyla' ('temple robbery') because of Jewish "sacrilegious propensities" (*Ag. Ap.* 1.311). By implication Jewish religious practices and laws are understood to be the direct function of the xenophobia of Moses the original yet sub-standard lawgiver.²⁴ These traditions clearly supported a commonly accepted perception of Jews as avaricious misanthropes, a perception Philo seeks to subvert.

Philo provides two explanations for events, both of which have merit and both of which argue that since the despoliation coheres with human convention, it constitutes a 'suitable' action. He first justifies it as an act of peace by which those who have been unjustly enslaved seek proper reparation. One could easily ask, "How can slaves possibly expect to be paid? Isn't their manumission payment enough?" But Philo points out that the Jews were not slaves pure and simple, but those who had been unjustly enslaved because they arrived in Egypt as suppliants and guests.

²³ *Ag. Ap.* 1:228–251, 1:309–10; 2:121–125. See Gager, *Moses*, 113–133.

²⁴ Gager, *Moses*, 80–112.

Alan Watson notes that very few Roman legal texts treat the issue of enslavement by capture—an indication of very few restrictions,—yet there are several texts which clearly outline certain legal practices. He draws attention to a passage in Pomponius Sextus (a prolific Roman lawyer of the 2nd century A.D.) whose large-scale commentaries included thirty nine books on the writings of *Quintus Mucius Scaevola* called *Lectionum ad Q. Mucium Libri XXXIX*. Pomponius does not state but “clearly implies” in book 37 that even in a time of peace, a person who has been captured by the Roman state becomes a slave if he or she was a member of a community that had no official ties or treaties of hospitality with Rome.²⁵ Of course, capture by individuals for enslavement was considered piracy, but if the enslaved person was captured by the Roman state, they became the licit property of the state. A treaty or agreement of friendship with Rome was the sole means by which a powerless people could insure that they would not become enslaved by Rome.²⁶ Philo claims to have earlier discussed this event, and when we examine this passage we discover the claim that the Jews indeed had official residency and protection.

The Jews, as I have said before, were strangers (ξένοι), since famine had driven the founders of the nation, through lack of food, to migrate to Egypt from Babylon and the inland satrapies. They were, in a sense, suppliants, who had found a sanctuary in the pledged faith of the king (ὥς ἐπ’ ἄσυλον ἱερὸν τὴν τε βασιλέως πίστιν) and the pity felt for them by

²⁵ Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). 19–20. The Pompeius passage to which Watson refers is found in Emperor Justinian’s collection and abridgement of the writings of classical jurists, the *Digestum* (49.15.5.2) which came into force in Byzantium in 533. Mucius was a leading lawyer of the late Roman republic whose eighteen books on civil law became the most influential of the period. See also Reinhart Herzog and Peter L. Schmidt, *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike* (Munich, C.H. Beck, 1989–), 4:144–148. The text is as follows.

The right of return is also given in peace. For if we have neither friendship nor official ties of hospitality nor a treaty made for the sake of friendship with some other people, although they are not enemies yet what of ours [which] comes to them becomes theirs, and a free man of ours captured by them becomes theirs. The same is the case if something comes from them to us. In that case too the right of return is given.

In the case of Roman captors, the text mentions only property, but it is a safe assumption that the same conditions apply to the capture of free citizens without pacts of hospitality to Rome. For a further discussion of the text, see A. Watson, *The Law of Persons in the Later Roman Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 162ff.

²⁶ Piracy as a source of slavery, while common, was not recognized by Roman law, and if a victim could prove his piratic capture to a Roman magistrate, he could claim back his freedom. See T. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 111.

the inhabitants...And in thus making serfs of men who were not only free but guests, suppliants and settlers, he showed no shame or fear of the God of liberty and hospitality and of justice to guests and suppliants.²⁷

Thus, the claim being made by Philo is that the Egyptian enslavement was illicit not only because the Jews were suppliants, but because the enslavement of the Jews constituted a rupture of good faith with guests (ξένοι) to whom the Egyptians were obligated by their own treaty of hospitality. For this reason, the Jews were fully warranted in their making off with Egyptian treasures; it suitably constituted back wages for unpaid labor.

In making this first argument, Philo buttresses his position noting: "For what resemblance is there between forfeiture of money and deprivation of liberty, for which men of sense are willing to sacrifice not only their substance but their life?" Suicide in the Greco-Roman period was thought of as a conscious intentional act which, under certain circumstances, was wholly appropriate. It was commonly accepted as a calculated rational response to shame and dishonor.²⁸ Philo's argument is as follows: a man of sense is willing to give up his possessions or even his life if his liberty is threatened. Liberty is therefore more precious than life itself. The Egyptians stole liberty from the Jews and in doing so they took what was most precious. The Jews took possessions from the Egyptians in return. This was an exceedingly fair retaliation since what they took was less valuable than what was originally taken away from them. What Philo wants to show is that this act is not the

²⁷ Moses 1:34 and 36. A key word here is πίστις which here implies more than just 'faith' but a guarantee or a warrant of trust. Also important is Philo's triple usage of the word ξένοι—especially in its association with the word 'suppliants.' Here ξένοι means 'guests' (not strangers as Colson translates); ξένοι are persons of a foreign state with whom one has a treaty of hospitality which is binding upon its participants and their heirs (Hom. Od. 1.187, 313; 15.196; Il. 6.215). These treaties of hospitality were established by mutual presents (ξένια) and an appeal to Zeus (ξένιος) as protector of guests and suppliants. See Hom. Od. 8.546 (gifts of friendship), 9.270 and Il. 13.624–5 (here Menelaos appeals to Zeus as the avenger of violated hospitality). Liddell and Scott note that 'guest' is sometimes tied together with 'suppliant'—ἰκέτης—with Zeus the ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἰκετάων τε ξείνιος (Od. 9.270) (*Greek-English Lexicon* [9th Edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996] 1189). The fact that Philo has twice tied together the terms "guests and suppliants" (twice here and once above in par. 142) makes clear that he is appealing to this literary and ethical tradition.

²⁸ See "Suicide" in *OCL*. For suicide in Stoic thought, see also A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 206. Diogenes Laertius speaks of the Stoic notion of duties which are imposed upon a person by circumstances. He mentions the maiming of one's self and the sacrifice of properties (7.109).

full venting of the passions but a controlled event which by standard convention could not be deemed unfair since the compensation was less than the loss. The other justification Philo provides is very straightforward, especially in terms of the commonly accepted practice that the spoils go to the victor.²⁹ Again, Philo is arguing that the despoliation complied with the norms of human behavior, and thus was suitable for the community of the virtuous.

Philo appears to interpret the biblical phrase καὶ κύριος ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐναντίον Αἰγυπτίου (LXX Exod 12:36) to mean that the Hebrews were shielded by God (called “the righteous one”) so that they could repay themselves for their unpaid labors (142). Philo does not mention that the Jews asked for Egyptian treasures (Exod 12:35), but depicts the event as a taking of vengeance (using the verb ἀμύνω) yet without warlike preparations. While the word ‘providence’ is not used, the concept seems to be at work here, and the depiction of the event as guided and directed by providence must also compliment Philo’s apology for the despoliation. The philosophers described the laws of nature as divine providence, but their providence was fated, and providence for them often means little more than fate or the laws of nature. While Philo agrees with the notion of the inexorable laws of nature, he believes that God as a free agent has the right to change these laws of his own making. The possibility of miracles is important for Philo, and by upsetting these natural laws through miracle God enacts his providential care individually or for groups.³⁰ For Philo, the pursuit of godliness entails earthly wealth and conversely, those who lose their heavenly portion through evil deeds cannot prosper in acquiring earthly wealth (*Rewards* 104–5). “The lesson which Philo wishes to teach is that there is a correlation between the pursuit of an ungodly life and the withdrawal of God’s providence resulting in punishment, just as there is a correlation between the pursuit of a godly life and the granting of God’s providence.”³¹

Philo presents Moses as the rightful recipient of providence par excellence. In Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush, the

²⁹ “Booty” in *OCL*. See also excursus.

³⁰ H. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 2.451–2.

³¹ P. Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 178. See also M. Kraus, “Philosophical History in Philo’s *In Flaccum*” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (Edited by E. Lovering, Jr., Atlanta, 1994), 477–495.

angel is a “symbol of God’s providence” which brings relief to the greatest dangers exceeding every hope (*Moses* 1.67). Moses, Philo elsewhere says, arrives in Egypt with full confidence that his leadership is guided by divine providence (*Hypothetica* 6:1). Certain plagues are said to have occurred not because of nature but due to divine providence (*Moses* 1:132). In *Heir* 58, in language strikingly similar, we read that divine providence is Israel’s “protecting arm and shield.” For Philo, Israel’s history is an inextricable expression of God’s providence.³² The despoliation is thus an act of providence by which the righteous are rewarded. Since the despoliation was an act of divine providence, Philo does not try to downplay its extent or try to explain it away. He emphasizes God’s justice in the event (referring to him as ὁ δίκαιός) by which the righteous are providentially rewarded.

We observe one further connection between Philo and the biblical depiction of the despoliation. In our introduction, it was argued that the biblical justification for the despoliation is similar to that of all the plagues; namely, the plagues and the despoliation answer Pharaoh’s proud question, “Who is Yahweh?” (Exod 5:2). The story from that point develops so as to answer that question and to make the LORD known, not only to the Hebrews (6:3, 7; 10:2) but to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (7:5; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18) and eventually to all the peoples of the earth (15:14–15; 18:8–12). God’s purpose for the plagues is most clearly identified in 9:14–16 in words to be spoken to Pharaoh himself.

¹⁴ For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that (בְּעִבּוֹר) you may know that there is none like Me in all the world. ¹⁵I could have stretched forth my hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth. ¹⁶Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose (בְּעִבּוֹר twice): in order (לְמַעַן) to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world” (NJPS).

The point of all the suffering and pestilence brought by God upon Egypt is identified in three positive statements: “that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth,” “to show you my power,” and “so that my fame may resound throughout the world.” God is in a showdown with Pharaoh over who is the greatest power in the world. God will prove that there is none like himself in the whole world, and

³² Frick, *Divine Providence*, 186.

this will be made known throughout the whole world by this display of power.

A very similar theme is developed by Philo in *Moses* 1.143 (immediately following the despoliation) and 1.146, where the despoliation is grouped with the plagues by which Egypt is admonished such that “never was judgment so clearly passed on good and bad, a judgment which brought perdition to the latter and salvation to the former” (1:146). The primary lesson, Philo says, was the most profitable of all lessons—piety. Philo has both accepted the biblical theme and transformed it from the biblical notion of ‘knowing God’ to the hellenized (or should we say philonized) piety. Philo, at this point, brings together the philosophical components of his thought with the Jewish ones. Piety (θεοσέβεια) is a super-virtue that subsumes all other virtues (*Spec. Laws* 4:135).³³ This plays a role in the manner in which Philo contradicts the common philosophical notion that man with only the power of reason has all necessary conditions for the moral life. Philo contends that human reason alone is not sufficient, and that man is dependant upon truth coming to him to liberate him so as to choose good over evil. Faith thus becomes the new theological virtue so that the wise man is the one who has faith in God.³⁴ Philo’s unique emphasis on grace and the theological virtues lies behind his contention that piety exists above the virtues typically emphasized by the philosophers. Here again, we see that while Philo draws on themes genuine to the biblical account, he shapes them for his hellenistic context.

Our next question is, “How does Philo draw upon traditional exegesis?” We have already noted that EstR 7:13 also describes beasts of burden used to transport the treasures of Egypt similarly as does Philo—the donkeys exaggerate the despoliation and thus glorify Israel’s victory. The general concept of the despoliation as the payment of a fair wage we have already seen in Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* 162–66, *Jub.* 48:18, *Wis* 10:16–17, 20. We will also encounter it in various places in the rabbinic corpus. Philo’s emphasis on the despoliation as vengeance is similar to what we have encountered in Jubilees although Jubilees

³³ For the intermingling of philosophical and Jewish thought in terms of Philo’s understanding of piety, see N.G. Cohen, “The Greek Virtues and the Mosaic Laws in Philo: an Elucidation of *De Specialibus Legibus* IV 133–135” in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 5 (1993): 9–23.

³⁴ G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: IV The Schools of the Imperial Age* (trans. John R. Catan, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 200–202.

does not emphasize the characteristic of the despoliation as justified vengeance because it causes lesser harm. We have already noted that Philo's accentuation of the trickery of the event is strikingly uncharacteristic of the interpretive method of other pre-Rabbinic writers, but reminiscent of what we saw in our study of the Septuagint's addition of κρυφῇ in Exod. 11:2. Explaining the event in terms of providence is not, of course, unique to Philo. We shall see Josephus avoiding the association of providence with the despoliation, but Jubilees and Wisdom do not fail to make this association. The despoliation understood in terms of the biblical theme that the tragedies suffered by Egypt were God's method of making his name known throughout the world is found in Philo's *Moses*, Wis 10:17 and *Jub.* 48:18 (in Wis, it illustrates the benefits of wisdom). Only Philo transforms the biblical notion of "knowing that there is none like the Lord" into the theological virtue of piety whereby one sees God.

Finally, we ask: "What is unique to Philo?" Philo is unique in his transformation of the historical freedom of Abraham's descendants when they moved into Egypt into a philosophical freedom of the well-born. If our above interpretation is correct, also unique is Philo's implicit use of the stoic categories of κατόρθωμα and καθήκον to justify the despoliation. Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 2:20—as we shall see) also insists with Philo that the despoliation is justifiable since it constitutes back wages for those illegally enslaved in terms of the law that forbids the enslavement of those who have a guarantee of liberty. But Philo's closely argued legal justification is unique among the Jewish interpreters in this regard.

PHILO'S *WHO IS THE HEIR?*

It comes as no surprise that Philo is the first of all ancient interpreters to allegorize the despoliation of Egypt in *Heir* 271–274. What comes as something of a surprise is the fact that Philo chooses Gen. 15:14 as the text upon which to practice his allegorizing arts.

²⁷¹ The sovereignties of the passions (ἡγεμονίαι παθῶν) here named entail a grievous slavery on their subjects (βαρεῖαν τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ἐπάγουσι δουλείαν), until God the arbiter and judge (ὁ βραβευτής καὶ δικαστής) makes a separation (διακρίνη|) between the ill-treater and the ill-treated (τὸ κακούμενον ἀπὸ τοῦ κακοῦντος), brings forth the one to full liberty (τὸ μὲν εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐξέλγεται παντελῇ) and renders to the other the recompense for his misdeeds (τῷ δὲ τὰπίχειρα ὧν ἐξήμαρτεν ἀποδῶ).

²⁷² For we read, “the nation whom they shall serve I will judge, and after this they shall come out hither with much stock” (τὸ δὲ ἔθνος ᾧ ἂν δουλεύσωσιν κρινῶ ἐγώ · μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐξελεύσονται ὧδε μετὰ ἀποσκευῆς πολλῆς—Gen 15:14). It must needs be that mortal man (ἀνάγκη γὰρ θνητὸν ὄντα) shall be oppressed by the nation of the passions (τῷ τῶν παθῶν ἔθνει πιεσθῆναι) and receive the calamities which are proper to created being (τὰς οἰκείους τῷ γενομένῳ κήρας ἀναδέξασθαι), but it is God’s will to lighten the evils which are inherent in our race (βούλημα δὲ θεοῦ τὰ σύμφута κακὰ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἐπικουφίζειν).

²⁷³ So while we shall suffer at first such things as are proper to ourselves, enslaved as we are to cruel masters, God will accomplish the work which is proper to Himself in proclaiming redemption and liberty to the souls which are His suppliants, and not only will He provide release from bonds and an issue from the closely-guarded prison, but give us also the viaticum (ἐφόδια) which he here calls “stock” (ἀποσκευήν).

²⁷⁴ What is the meaning of this? It is when the mind which has come down from heaven, though it be fast bound in the constraints of the body (ἐνδεθῇ ταῖς σώματος ἀνάγκαις), nevertheless is not lured by any of them to embrace like some hybrid, man-woman or woman-man (οἷα ἀνδρόγυνος ἢ γύνανδρος), the pleasant-seeming evils (τὰ ἡδέα... κακά), but holding to its own nature of true manhood has the strength to be victor instead of victim in the wrestling-bout. Reared in all the lore of the schools (τοῖς τῆς ἐγκυκλίου μουσικῆς ἐντραφεὶς ἄπασιν),¹ it acquires therefrom a longing for the higher contemplation (ἐξ ὧν θεωρίας λαβὼν ἕμερον), and

¹ A noun may be missing at this point in the text. Mangey proposed προπαιδεύμασιν, Wendland παιδεύμασιν, and Colson and Whitaker μαθήμασιν.

wins the sturdy virtues of self-mastery and perseverance (ἐγκράτειαν καὶ καρτερίαν, ἐρωμένους ἀρετάς, ἐκτήσατο); and thus when the pilgrim wins his return to his native land (μετανιστάμενος καὶ κάθοδον τὴν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα εὐρισκόμενος), he takes with him all these fruits of instruction (πάντ' ἐπάγεται τὰ παιδείας), which are here called “stock.”²

As we have already, we will continue to begin our study asking how the exegete balances between what the scripture actually says, and what he takes it to mean. Philo begins his discussion by referring to the “sovereignities of the passions here named” which refers to the previous paragraphs 269–70 which allegorize the four hundred years of enslavement and mistreatment in store for Abram’s descendents (Gen 15:13) as the enslavement of the soul to the four passions.³ He says (269), “‘And the slavery is for four hundred years’”; thus he shews the powers exercised by the four passions.” The word ‘slavery’ (δουλεία) is a standard term for Philo to describe the results of the passions and/or outward senses (that is, all that drags the soul earthward) on the soul.⁴ In 271, the passions allegorized as Egypt bring Abram’s descendents into enslavement until God “makes a separation between the ill-treater and the ill-treated.” Philo uses the terms ὁ βραβευτής καὶ δικαστής to expand on the biblical phrase “I will judge.” He transforms the biblical notion of God’s judgment on Israel’s oppressors (τὸ δὲ ἔθνος ᾧ ἂν δουλεύσωσιν κρινῶ ἐγώ) into God’s role as the one who distinguishes (διακρίνῃ) between the soul and its passions which he defines as “the ill-treater and the ill-treated” (τὸ κακούμενον ἀπὸ τοῦ κακούντος).

In 272, Philo’s understanding of the biblical phrase “they will come out hither” (ἐξελεύσονται ὧδε) as a bringing “forth the one to full liberty” continues what is an almost constant theme throughout Philo, namely, the heavenly ascent of the soul.⁵ Indeed, the heir concerning which this tractate is entitled is the one who inherits this ascent to God (*Heir* 68–70). This being the case, Philo understands the term ὧδε, which

² Philo, *Who is the Heir?* 271–274 [Colson, LCL].

³ T. Tobin has pointed out that when Philo claims that an interpretation is allegorical, he usually means something quite specific; that is, his allegory interprets the external world of the biblical text in terms of the conflicts within the soul in its striving toward virtue and wisdom or in its corruption by vice (*The Creation of Man: Philo and the Interpretation of History*, [Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983], 146–48). Our text is very typical of Philo’s allegorizing method.

⁴ In just our context, we have *Heir* 268 and 269. Some other examples are *Alleg. Interp.* 3. 17, 192, 198, 199; *Cherubim* 75; *Sacrifices* 122; *Agriculture* 114 and *Planting* 53.

⁵ Reale calls the journey of the soul to God, “The whole philosophy of Philo, in the ultimate analysis,” (*Schools of the Imperial Age*, 202).

in the Septuagint refers to a return from Egypt to Abram's home in Canaan, to refer to the soul's true home in God's presence when the soul's journey to God has been completed. This is the soul's ultimate liberty from passions. While the Septuagintal Pentateuch makes no use of the term ἐλευθερία in relation to Israel's freedom from Egypt, Philo transforms the biblical promise of deliverance from oppression into a philosophical ἐλευθερία from the passions by the soul's ascent to a true perception of God.

Philo specifies the soul's liberty in *Heir* 68–9; the soul is challenged to leave the prison of the body, the senses (αἰσθησις), and speech (λόγος). We see elsewhere in Philo (*Heir* 232, cf. *Cherubim* 22–26) that the irrational soul is divided into seven parts as was typical in Stoic and Platonic thought: the five senses, speech and the reproductive faculty (associated in *Heir* 69 with the body). Since only the mind of man has been received from God, it alone is deemed by Philo worthy of freedom (*God* 47–48). The body and the irrational elements of the soul remain outside the realm of freedom. Only as man forsakes what is created, mortal and perishable, will he experience true liberty.⁶ It should be noted that Philo did not espouse an absolute liberty of the will as Wolfson once argued. He did, along with many other classical and Hellenistic writers, espouse a relative free-will doctrine which both absolved God of moral responsibility for human evil (αἰτία ἐλομένου, θεὸς ἀνάιτιος) yet was deterministic in that it “seems to be tied to the notion of an all-penetrating divine Logos that reaches into each person's mind, thus converting it to an extension of the divine mind, albeit a very fragmentary one.”⁷ Present humanity has fallen from its original grandeur, his original piety, innocence and simplicity of character with an automatic inclination to the good. Man is now embroiled in the war of the passions (*Creation* 136–154) and in this condition, man has the dubious privilege to choose between good and evil, liberty and slavery.⁸

But the soul of man alone has received from God the faculty of voluntary movement, and in this way especially is made like to Him, and thus

⁶ R. Baer, Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 93.

⁷ D. Winston, “Freedom and Determinism in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Ancestral Philosophy: Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. G. Sterling, Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001), 149. For Wolfson's position, against which Winston argues, see Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:432–55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 136, note 3.

being liberated, as far as might be from that hard and ruthless mistress, necessity, may justly be charged with guilt, in that it does not honor its Liberator. And therefore it will rightly pay the inexorable penalty which is meted to ungrateful freemen (*God* 47).

Before we continue to examine Philo's transformation of this passage, I will briefly summarize Philo's understanding of the heavenly ascent of the soul. Philo primarily follows the Platonic dualistic theory of man whereby the whole universe is filled with souls. Some, called angels or daemons, are stationed at a higher level and mediate God's dealings with the world and others stand nearer the earth and are attracted by sensuality to descend into mortal bodies (*Gig.* 11–12).⁹ The soul of man is just one of those divine powers which were originally called angels. The human *pneuma* is an effluence of divinity, as indicated in the creation story: God has breathed his spirit into man (*Worse* 80). The body which is the animal side of man, is the source of all evil, the prison which confines the spirit (*Drunkenness* 101; *Alleg. Interp.* 3.42; *Migration* 9), the corpse which the soul must drag along (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.69, *Giants* 15), and the tomb out of which the soul will awaken to true life (*Migration* 16; *Alleg. Interp.* 1.108). Since sensuality as such is evil, sin is innate in man (*Moses* 2.147). No one can keep himself free from it, even if he lives only for one day (*Names* 48).¹⁰ This highest need for the ethical life was for the complete renunciation of sensuality, passion and desire. This perspective was most compatible with the ethical system of the Stoics to whom Philo primarily adheres.

In some passages, Philo does not attribute man's sin just to his corporeal nature but to an unnatural relationship between the higher and lower parts of his being since God created not only the rational soul but the physical body (*Creation* 72–75, *Heir* 73). Philo can likewise speak positively of the senses, holding that the faculty is only bad in a fool when it is employed without wisdom (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.67). Thus, sense-perception, the body, and even the passions, when under the rightful control of the *nous*, contribute to the good and are praiseworthy, yet his negative perspective is typical. On the whole, sense-perception, pleasure and the body are evil realities *per se*, and to be shunned entirely

⁹ Morris, "The Jewish Philosopher Philo," 3.2, 886. See also Reale, *The Schools of the Imperial Age*, 202–204, and P. Borgen, "Heavenly Ascent in Philo" in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (ed. J. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans, Sheffield: JSOT Press), 246–268 and Tobin, *The Creation of Man*, 135–176.

¹⁰ Morris, "The Jewish Philosopher Philo," 887.

(*Alleg. Interp.* 3:70).¹¹ A primary point of difference between Philo and his Stoic counterparts is his insistence upon divine grace; only the man who honors God and surrenders himself to Him for his succor can possibly attain perfection (*Alleg. Interp.* 1.48). True perfection imitates that of the deity (*Creation* 144; *Virtues* 168; *Migration* 131, 175).

While the goal of human life is for the soul to ascend again to the deity, yet it has become ensnared in this sensual life through its fall away from the heavens and association with the body. He must struggle upwards out of all the passions that ensnare the soul to a direct vision of God; he must be swallowed up into that divine light. The spirit of God indwells the sage and stirs his soul like the strings of a musical instrument (*Heir* 69–70). He has attained the highest earthly form of blessedness above which only remains the complete deliverance from this body which is the reward of all those who have kept themselves free from attachments to the passions of the sensual body (*Abr.* 258; *Alleg. Interp.* 1.108).

In our text, Philo continues his allegory by claiming that it is necessary for man, being mortal, to be oppressed by the nation of the passions (*Heir* 272). The term ‘nation,’ in reference to the passions, ties together the idea of the passions with the nation of Egypt, a motif, as we have seen, that is rather standard for him.¹² The passions are typically understood as being four in number (*Alleg. Interp.* 3. 47, 139), which for Philo, constitutes a nation. The one who, by necessity due to his mortality, suffers under the tyranny of the passions (ἀνάγκη γὰρ θνητὸν ὄντα) is in the biblical text the whole nation of Israel, here universalized to represent people whose souls struggle in the presence of earthly passions and senses. That mortals suffer from the passions *necessarily* is a commonplace in Philo; we see it also in *Heir* 274 ταῖς σόματος ἀνάγκαις. “Man is portrayed as a sinner not because he is wrongly related to the created world but simply because he is a part of that world.”¹³ The sphere of the created world, the sphere of mortality and change, for Philo, is the realm of ἀνάγκη, and as such it is

¹¹ Baer, *Philo's Use*, 89–91.

¹² On the Passions in Philo, see also D. Aune, “Mastery of the Passions: Philo, 4 Maccabees and Earliest Christianity,” *Hellenization Revisited, Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (ed. W. Hellenman, Lanham, 1994), 125–158.

¹³ Baer, *Philo's Use*, 92. As we noted above, Philo, along with most other classical and Hellenistic Greek writers, and even other Jewish Hellenistic and rabbinic writers, believed in the relative freedom of the will.

contrasted sharply to God who is a being of free will (*Dreams* 2.253). It is in this way that Philo can say that man must receive the calamities which are proper to his created being (τὰς οἰκείους τῷ γενομένῳ κήρας ἀναδέξασθαι).

Philo found his textual warrant for this necessity of the soul's suffering bondage to the passions in the divine prediction of the period of bondage in the previous verse, LXX Gen 15:13: καὶ δουλώσουσιν αὐτοὺς καὶ κακώσουσιν αὐτοὺς καὶ ταπεινώσουσιν αὐτοὺς τετρακόσια ἔτη. Colson and Whittaker have noted that the κακά of 272 echoes the septuagintal κακώσουσιν and that ἀνάγκαις in *Heir* 274 is an echo of δουλώσουσιν.¹⁴ Philo's claim that it is the divine will to lighten the evils inherent in our race moves us back to LXX Gen 15:14; τὸ δὲ ἔθνος ᾧ ἂν δουλεύσωσιν κρινῶ ἐγώ. By judging the passions (Egypt) God is lightening the evils inherent in our race, a theme he spells out rather typically in paragraph 273.

What interests us here is Philo's use of the androgynous hybrids and his interpretation of the Septuagint's μετὰ ἀποσκευῆς πολλῆς as ἐφόδια, which Colson and Whittaker render 'viaticum,'¹⁵ Paragraph 274 spell out the meaning of his allegory in some detail. He begins again in a rather typical fashion: the descent of the mind into the prison of the body and the constraints the body places upon the mind. This allegorizes the literal descent of Abram's descendants into Egypt promised in the previous verse (Gen 15:13). But when the mind is not lured by bodily constraints into the embrace of a hybrid man-woman or woman-man, it rises in victory over these constraints. What is the significance of the androgynous hybrids here?

In order to answer this question we will briefly review Philo's usage of the categories of male and female. Philo makes a fundamental distinction between a higher and a lower part of man's being—a distinction which uses differing terms with varying nuances yet remains constant throughout Philo's writings. In some texts, the distinction is between our animal part and our man part (*Worse* 82–84) and in other passages, the distinction is between the rational and irrational parts of the soul (*Heir* 232). In *Creation* 134 Philo claims that it is only the mind of man which is created in the divine image, and that mortal man presently consists of both body and soul and is both male and female. The male-

¹⁴ Philo, *Who is the Heir?* 274 (Colson, LCL).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 423.

female polarity is corporeal and earthly. It is perceptible to the senses and created from a lump of clay. In *Heir* 232–33 and 236 Philo draws a distinction between man's higher *nous*, which is indivisible and in God's image, and the irrational part of the soul, which is divided into seven parts. It is the irrational part of the soul that participates in the categories of male and female, the realm of the sexual. Nowhere does Philo associate the rational soul of man with the male-female polarity.¹⁶ Man's rational soul, created in God's image, has no connection with the sphere of becoming, change and reproduction (*Creation* 69). For Philo, the male-female polarity is a part of the mortal, corruptible world of the body and its senses. The rational soul of man is neither male nor female but asexual. It is patterned after the divine Logos, which itself belongs to a realm in which there is no male nor female.¹⁷

Philo, in *Creation* 136ff., describes the original man as noble and excellent in the totality of his being, not simply in terms of his rational soul. Sense-perception was under rightful rule of the mind and accurately portrayed to the mind objects of the sense-perceptible world (*Creation* 139). His state of oneness and unity remained unchanged until the appearance of the woman who became for him the ἀρχὴ τῆς ὑπαιτίου ζωῆς (*Creation* 151). *Creation* 151–52 also indicates that the sin of the first man was the result of sexual desire which began bodily pleasure (ἡ τῶν σωματίων ἡδονή) for the sake of which man exchanged his life of immortality and bliss for mortality and wretchedness.¹⁸

Yet, in Philo's description of the original man, it is apparent that he conceives of this Adam as androgynous by nature. In *Creation* 151–52, specifically the word εἷς in μέχρη μὲν γὰρ εἷς ἦν, and the statement, "Love supervenes, bring together and fits into one the divided halves, as it were, of a single living creature," indicate heavy dependence upon the famous myth of the androgynous first man in Plato's *Symposium* 189C–193D. Here, Aristophanes explains the meaning of ἔρως by means of the myth of the androgynous man. "As long as male and female were part of one and the same being, they were not tempted by desire for each other. The first man, androgynous by nature, was able to give himself fully to God and was not distracted by the attractions of the material world, chief of which is sexual desire."¹⁹ When the androgynous

¹⁶ Baer, *Philo's Use*, 18–19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

man was separated into two parts, the resulting male-female polarity brought about lust which precipitated his downfall.

Thus the story of the fall tells not just of the fall of the first man but of the origin of sin in the life of everyman. In the present state, the man corresponds with the *nous*/mind and the woman with sense-perception/body (*Creation* 165, *Alleg. Interp.* 2.73). Female terminology is for Philo a vehicle to express his depreciation of the created world. While in some passages Philo can speak positively about creation, he sees all contact with the created world as a deleterious hindrance to the life of virtue which stands as a constant threat to man's existence.²⁰

However, when Philo uses the term ἀνδρόγυνος, a term he uses eight times, or the term γύνανδρος, which he uses thrice (*Virtues* 21, *Heir* 274 and *Sacrifices* 100), the sense is completely critical, and it is clear that he is condemning effeminacy and various types of homosexuality.²¹ Philo condemns homosexuality in *Abr.* 135–36 and *Spec. Laws* 3.37–42. Pederasty is particularly in view in *Contmpl. Life* 59, a passage which also specifically deals with Plato's myth of the androgynous man which Philo wrongs reads as favoring homosexuality.²² Philo was able to make use of the androgynous myth in Plato's *Symposium* positively in terms of man's original androgynous—and thus untempted by sexuality—state, and negatively in terms of the evils of the various forms of homosexuality. The hybrids man-woman and woman-man in our text represent the very center of human corruption—pleasant-seeming evils of homosexuality—which constrain the soul and drag it away from its true calling to freedom through contemplation. It is against this distraction that man must fight as a victor in a wrestling match. These hybrid desires are the entanglements of Egypt which enslave the soul to the corruption of dissipation.

Philo's recipe for liberty is rearing of the soul in the 'lore of the schools.' Here we see Philo cautiously endorsing secular or encyclical Greek education (*enkyklios paideia*). In our passage, Philo uses the phrase τοῖς τῆς ἐγκυκλίου μουσικῆς ἐντραφεῖς ἄπασιν (see note one above). The association of the encyclicia with music specifically, here as in other passages, indicates that Philo thought of the encyclicia as an education in

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

²¹ For the possibility that Philo also condemns female homoeroticism in texts using γύνανδρος, see Holger Szesnat, "Philo and Female Homoeroticism" in *JST* 30.1 (1999) 140–147.

²² Ibid., 83.

harmony. This description of the encyclical with musical terms is earlier than Philo and is associated with the harmony which both music and general culture were to instill in the student.²³ Philo here can be seen as taking a position between two extremes; complete rejection and complete appropriation of Greek culture. The disciplines of encyclical education—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music—are discussed in Plato's *Republic* and reappear in post-classical times as the *quadrivium*. Taken together with the literary arts of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic (the *trivium*), they comprise the encyclical (*enkyklios paideia*).

Philo understands a basic difference between those who make this ascent by "teaching" (διδασκτόν) and those who are "self-taught" (αὐτομαθές—*Names* 255 [263]). Here Philo develops Greek educational ideas concerning the contrast between intuitive talents by nature—the nature of the sage and philosophy—and the progress that comes by encyclical teaching.²⁴ In the homily of *Names* 253–263, Philo contrasts the moral development of the encyclical system with the self-taught nature of philosophy using the biblical examples of the difference between the food which comes from the earth by the labor of husbandman (259) with the self-grown fruits of the Sabbatical year (257). Technical cultivation represents in this context (260) the encyclical education. While Philo speaks of the ascent to heaven in various ways, in *Spec.* 2.229–30 Philo writes that parents in the upbringing of children make use of both the encyclical education and philosophy to cultivate their souls and lift their mind and escort it to heaven.²⁵

While the encyclical was often viewed as having little value in its own right—it was only a preliminary preparation for the study of philosophy—Philo endows the encyclical with an inherent spiritual value which represents a significant shift in the history of liberal studies.²⁶ For Philo, there are three kinds of lives, one looking Godwards, another looking to created things, another on the border-line, a mixture of the other two.

The God-regarding life has never come down to us, nor submitted to the constraints of the body. The life that looks to creation has never risen

²³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴ P. Borgen, *Bread From Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 107.

²⁵ Ibid., 267.

²⁶ A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1983), xxiv.

at all nor sought to rise, but makes its lair in the recesses of Hades and rejoices in a form of living, which is not worth the pains. It is the mixed life, which often drawn on by those of the higher line is possessed and inspired by God, though often pulled back by the worse it reverses its course (*Heir* 45–46).

Philo admits that a few of these God-born men, the *sophoi*, sages by birth, do inhabit this earth (*Names* 256). They are not necessarily angels, but are angelic in their perception of the divine, their untaught knowledge of God, and their permanent status as virtuous men.

Ordinary men who live in a world of “storms and wars” and struggle with common impulses of life Philo calls “heaven-born men.” Men in this class are progressing towards perfection; they are mid-stream in terms of learning, ethics and spiritual development.²⁷ Philo thinks most persons, including himself (*Spec. Laws* 3.1–6) are heaven-born men. These men can catch glimpses of divine glory, but the presence of God does not remain long with them, and their ascent to heaven leads to a descent back to earth (*Giants* 53). Yet, for these imperfect but improving heaven-born men, the encyclicia is a primary means by which their souls can be weaned from things earthly and drawn into the divine contemplations which deliver the soul from earthly bondages.

While some may advance to the higher stage of perfect contemplation (characterized by Abram), most heaven-born persons ascend in contemplation through the encyclicia while remaining ultimately in their original station in life. The soul ascends through the study of partial knowledge of the disciplines to knowledge of God. The soul, by dipping deep into the school-lore knowledge, sees reflected in their training as in a mirror the Author of that knowledge (*Flight* 213). Those who seek to discern the Uncreated, and the Creator, from his creation are making a “happy guess” (*Rewards* 46). “For any discipline which *orders* phenomena in the physical universe may lead to knowledge of God from design.”²⁸

In the allegory of *Heir* 274, the benefits of instruction of the encyclicia are the provisions (ἐφόδια) by which the soul makes its way from the bondage of Egypt to the liberty of the promised land. Here, because of the journey motif, he emphasizes that the encyclicia provides the student with “the sturdy virtues of self-mastery and perseverance;” that is, the

²⁷ Ibid., 55.

²⁸ Ibid., 78.

viaticum provides strength for the journey of the soul. Philo understood the ἀποσκευή of his passage, the despoliation of Egypt, in the literal sense, as the ἐφόδια which provided stock needed for their journey into Canaan. This interpretation would not have been as natural in Exod 12:35–36 since the vessels of silver and gold and clothes can hardly be considered traveling provisions.

This brings us to another question: How does Philo use this passage to speak to his particular cultural/historical context? Philo chose the encycilia, the most mundane strata of Greek heritage, and incorporates it into his soteriology so as to accommodate himself, at least at this point, to his cultural environment.²⁹ Philo was neither completely at ease with pagan learning nor completely at odds with it. Émile Brehier has written:

Malgré son goût personnel pour les curiosités, Philon est peu sympathique à cette culture. Il réprimande ceux qui s'adonnent exclusivement aux sciences encycliques. Ce reproche s'adresse dans sa généralité à tous les savants spécialistes, grammairiens et géomètres, mais surtout aux rhéteurs qui en effet utilisaient la philosophie comme recueil de thèmes oratoires. Philon n'admet donc pas que toutes les sciences spéciales et tous les arts soient considérés comme étant à eux-mêmes leur but. Il faut faire hommage de toutes les sciences, à leur maîtresse la vertu, c'est-à-dire n'en prendre que ce qui peut servir à la vertu et à la gloire de Dieu.³⁰

Philo sought to accommodate his thought to the fact that many elite Jewish youths would be enrolled in Greek institutions. Philo appears to have asked himself how he could turn this circumstance to an advantage. Jews, he insists, should utilize the encycilia in their strivings toward divine knowledge instead of exploiting the acquisition of Greek culture simply to further their social and political ambitions. If Jewish youth were driven (for whatever reason) to acquire the culture of the day, they could do so within a Jewish context. Philo sought to provide that context with knowledge which originated in secular education.³¹ Philo's allegory of this passage is completely unique in all its details; that is, there is no parallel to it in any other Jewish literature based on the despoliation of Egypt. Yet, as we shall see, this allegory, beginning with Origen, had a strong impact on the theology and praxis of the Christian world.

²⁹ Ibid., 81.

³⁰ *Les Idées Philosophiques*, 287–88.

³¹ Mendelson, *Secular Education*, 82.

JOSEPHUS

The Jewish Antiquities, the second and longest work of Josephus, was published in twenty volumes which tell the story of the Jewish people from the creation to the last procurator (Florus) before the war with Rome. Josephus' own reference in the conclusion (20:267) to the thirteenth year of Domitian (93–94 C.E.) allow the work's completion to be dated exactly. The closing years of the first century C.E. were difficult ones for the Jewish people in the Roman world. Whom specifically was Josephus trying to reach with the *Antiquities*? What was the genre in which he wrote? What were his sources? How does he present Moses and his role as the lawgiver? How does Josephus understand God's role in human events? A brief introduction to these issues lays the groundwork not only for understanding Josephus' presentation of the plundering of Egypt but its intended function in Josephus' social context.

Was Josephus trying to communicate primarily with a gentile or Jewish audience? As we have just seen, the exigencies of the age gave rise to the need for both. Josephus claims to expect a gentile audience (*Ant.* 1.5, 9; 20.262) and seems to be constantly aware of the special needs of his Gentile readers in not assuming knowledge of Judean laws or customs.¹ Josephus, with little modesty, believes the whole Greek-speaking world will find his work worthy of attention (*Ant.* 1.5), yet we can hardly imagine many non-Jews were willing to wade through all twenty volumes. More exactly, Josephus wrote primarily for gentile readers who were deeply interested in Judean history and culture. This is what the prologue implies; he writes because he has been encouraged to do so by those who are interested in Judaism, namely Epaphroditus, a lover of all kinds of learning (*Ant.* 1:8). Although scholars often characterize the *Antiquities* as a fiercely defensive *apologia*, Josephus claims to have written under pressure from those outside the faith who are deeply curious about it.² Josephus states that his *Antiquities* is based on the confidence that there are many 'lovers of learning' like

¹ S. Mason, "Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*" in *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 3:xix. See G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 298–302.

² Mason, "Introduction," 3:xx.

Ptolemy Philadelphus, who commissioned the Septuagint (1.12). With these more favorable gentiles, he sought to consolidate and edify their support toward the Jews. But clearly Josephus also wrote for the non-Jewish public that was neutral towards Judaism hoping to counteract the activities of the Jew baiters like Apion.³

At the same time, there are indications in certain sections of *Ant.* Josephus has a Jewish readership in mind as well. Josephus hopes an innovation in his presentation of the laws of Moses will not offend his fellow Jews (4.197). There are other such examples.⁴ Apologetics and edification are not inseparable categories, but seem to have been tackled by Josephus at the same time. Sterling says:

Writing the full story of his own people, Josephos sought to win a place of respectability for them by Hellenizing their native traditions. Like a Janus head, [*Antiquitates Judaicae*] also addressed the Jews hoping its Hellenized definition of Judaism would help to reconcile them to their place in the world. Josephos followed Berossos and Manetho by insisting on native sources and the Hellenistic Jewish historians by Hellenizing Israel's sacred texts. Yet he dwarfed them all quantitatively and qualitatively and stands at the apex of apologetic historiography.⁵

The *Antiquities* has been understood primarily as representative of one of two generic classifications: either 'rewritten Bible' or 'apologetic historiography.' Without reviewing the arguments in either direction, it is the position taken here that the *Antiquities* can best be understood as the later.⁶ Sterling defines this genre:

³ P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 103.

⁴ P. Spilsbury, *The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus' Paraphrase of the Bible* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 21–2.

⁵ G. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 19.

⁶ On the genre of 'rewritten Bible,' see P. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (Edited by D. Carson and H. Williamson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99–121, and G. Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Edited by M. Stone, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 89–156. Also Vermes and Schürer (*The History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:346–55) describe the process which gave rise to 'rewritten Bible' as: "The regular reading of Scripture and the constant meditation on it with a view to interpreting, expounding and supplementing its stories and resolving its textual, contextual and doctrinal difficulties, resulted in a pre-rabbinic haggadah which, once introduced into the scriptural narrative itself, produced a 'rewritten Bible,' a fuller, smoother and doctrinally more advanced form of the sacred narrative" (3.1:308).

Apologetic historiography is the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group's own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.⁷

Examples of such prose works are Hecataeus, Berossus and Manetho. These authors were responding to the writings of others which they considered malicious, defamatory and ignorant. Josephus, like these writers, seeks to create a new and improved image of his ethnic group in the Hellenistic cultural ethos. Understanding *Ant.* in this genre better explicates the apologetic tone of the work and its function in the Greco-Roman context. While Josephus' *Antiquities* does share some of the narrative qualities of the Semitic examples of re-written Bible (*Genesis Apocryphon* or *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*), this is by chance and not design. Designating Josephus' *Antiquities* (or Philo's "Exposition of the Law") as re-written Bible "leads to an obfuscation of the unique character of Judaeo-Hellenistic exegesis."⁸

Josephus' apologetic efforts move forward on two fronts simultaneously, both defensive and offensive. Defensive apologetic is the response to specific charges brought by the Jews' opponents; i.e., Moses was a leper, the Jews are antagonistic to outsiders and cannot be trusted. Offensive apologetic is the elucidation of the positive features of Judaism without reference to prior slander.⁹

Because Moses was the one figure of Jewish tradition ubiquitously known in the pagan world and because the pagan anti-Semitic writers had berated him mercilessly, it was necessary for Josephus to focus his attention on painting Moses in more favorable light. Apollonius Molon and Lysimachus both proclaimed Moses to be a fraud and charlatan whose commandments taught not virtue but vice (*Ag. Ap.* 2:145; cf. 2:161 for Josephus' response).¹⁰ The importance of Moses for Josephus appears in the proem which claims almost all their constitution depends upon the wisdom of "our lawgiver Moses" (1.18).

⁷ Sterling, *Historiography*, 17.

⁸ A. Kamesar, review of *Philo of Alexandria, an Exegete for his Time*, by P. Borgen, *JTS* 50 (1999): 754–55.

⁹ Spilsbury, *Image*, 114. H. Attridge uses similar language (*The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* [Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1976], 181).

¹⁰ See G. Hata, "The Story of Moses Interpreted within the Context of Anti-Semitism," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (eds. L. Feldman and G. Hata, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) for further discussion of the anti-Jewish slander addressed by Josephus in *Ag. Ap.*

Yet, Josephus is careful not to aggrandize Moses excessively as rabbinic traditions with which he was clearly familiar.¹¹ The dominant rubric by which Josephus describes the life and work of Moses is that of ἀρετή which has both a military connotation (his excellence as a general) and ethical one (a paragon of virtue).¹² Josephus' Moses is virtuous—and thus able to live perfectly within the confines of the law—since he has complete control of his passions and emotions. In *Ant.* 4:143 Moses exhorts the Hebrews to believe true fortitude consists not in not violating the law but in resisting the lusts. In his final eulogy, Josephus notes Moses had such complete control of his passions, it was as if he hardly had any and knew of them primarily by perceiving them in others (4:328–9).¹³ In his final encomium he claims Moses surpassed all men in understanding (σύνεσις—4:328) and those who perused his laws understood the extraordinary virtue he was master of (4:331). Josephus does not, however, detract from the notion that the laws are the gift from God; he understands Moses' role, with all his inherent knowledge and virtue, as that of a mediator between God and the people.¹⁴

Justice is the crown of the virtues, and Josephus highlights this quality in all his heroes, especially Moses. In an addition to Exod 18:13, he claims all who came to Moses to obtain justice were convinced they would indeed obtain it with Moses as their arbitrator. Even those who lost their cases before him were satisfied justice, not partiality, had determined the decision (*Ant.* 3:66–7). Josephus notes that the Mosaic law stipulates every effort be made to avoid war, and when wars are necessary, they be conducted justly. In his expansion on Deut 20:10 which requires that terms of peace be offered to towns before attack, Josephus proclaims that when the Israelites are on the verge of war, they should send an embassy and heralds to the enemy.

For before taking up arms it is right to carry on discussions with them, revealing that though you have a large army, and horses and weapons and, above all, have God who is benevolent and an ally; nevertheless, you do not think it right to be forced to go to war with them, and by

¹¹ L. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Moses" *JQR* 82 (1992): 285.

¹² Spilsbury, *Image*, 95. The word is used with reference to Moses no less than twenty-one times. See Feldman, "Portrait," (292, n. 18).

¹³ For Moses' control of his passions, see Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History*, 166.

¹⁴ Spilsbury, *Image*, 103.

removing what is theirs to obtain in addition undesired gain for yourselves (*Ant.* 4.296).¹⁵

Here the Josephan Moses proclaims that any gain to be had by plunder would be completely unwanted and unsought by the Israelites, a notion which is in complete congruence with the manner in which Josephus has already presented the plundering of Egypt. Feldman points out that due to Josephus' close contacts with the Romans, their ideals, and their methods of warfare, he was presumably aware of their laws of war. According to Cicero, the one legitimate objective of making war is to live in peace unmolested; moreover, international law teaches that war is just only if it is duly declared after a formal demand for satisfaction (*Off.* 1:11.34–36 and *Rep.* 3.23.34–35). Feldman claims, "Josephus, in his considerable expansion of the above passage in Deuteronomy, recasts it in accord with these Roman ideals and methods of warfare," and in doing so, seems to ignore the biblical wars of conquest, reconquest, and expansion. Mercy is, for Josephus, a component of justice as is made clear by his excision of Moses' anger against the commander of his army for sparing the Midianite woman who had been guilty of leading Israelite men to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor (cf. Num 31:14–17 to *Ant.* 4:163). Josephus' alteration of the biblical imperative to slay the men and take the women, children and cattle captive after defeat (Deut 20:13–14) demands only that they "kill those who were ranged against you..." This opinion has some resonance with the injunction of Virgil "to impose the way of peace, to spare those subdued and to humble the haughty ones" (*Aen.* 6.852–3).¹⁶

Josephus, in his rehabilitation of the biblical Moses, was particularly interested in answering the charges that the Jews, in their provincialism, hated the rest of humanity, that they are taught to show goodwill to none but their own race (*Ag. Ap.* 1.249, 261, 264, 309; 2.121, 148, 258). We have noted Manetho claims not only did the Israelites set cities and villages on fire, pillage the temples and mutilate the images of the gods, they slaughtered and humiliated the Egyptian prophets and priests (*Ag. Ap.* 1:249). Lysimachus claims that Moses commanded the people to "show goodwill to no man, to offer not the best but the worst advice,

¹⁵ Translation of L. Feldman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Judean Antiquities I–IV* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 3:461. All translations taken from *Ant.* to follow are also Feldman's.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and to overthrow any temples and altars of the gods which they found” (*Ag. Ap.* 1:309–11). Similar calumnies were repeated later by Josephus’ own contemporary, Tacitus (*aduersus omnes alios hostile odium Histories* 5.5.1), as well as by Quintilian (3.7.21) who sets forth Moses, the creator of Jewish superstition, as an example of notorious founders of cities who brought together people bent on the destruction of others. Even Hecataeus, normally more positive toward the Jews and Moses, says that Moses introduced a certain unsocial and intolerant way of life (Diodorus 40.3.4).¹⁷ The relatively positive Pompeius Trogus claims that Moses carried off by stealth the sacred vessels of Egypt.¹⁸

Josephus, in response, is intent on proving that the Jewish people are forbid by the law of Moses from blaspheming the gods “whom other cities believe in, nor rob foreign temples, nor take a treasure that has been consecrated to some god” (*Ant.* 4:207). In his claim that Moses forbids the robbing of temples, he is responding to the ‘Jews as temple-robbers’ motif in Manetho, Lysimachus and Pompeius Trogus. While there is no biblical injunction similar to this, Josephus likely follows the LXX Exod 22:27 in reading “Thou shalt not revile gods” (θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις—MT Exod 22:28 לֹא תִקְלָם אֱלֹהִים).¹⁹ Josephus understands this to mean “our legislator has expressly forbidden us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others, out of respect for the very word “God” (*Ag. Ap.* 2:237). Josephus insists that the Mosaic code was crafted to encourage humanity (φιλανθρωπία) towards the world at large (*Ag. Ap.* 2:146) and to make it a the duty of all Jews to share with others and show consideration even for declared enemies.

Jews are also forbidden to despoil fallen combatants (ἀλλὰ καὶ σκυλεύειν ἀπείρηκε τοὺς ἐν τῇ μάχῃ πεσόντας—*Ag. Ap.* 2.211–12). There is no biblical law which actually forbids this.²⁰ As we will see in the excursus, the Greeks had no compunctions about stripping their dead enemies of the arms and armor (the classical meaning of the verb σκυλεύειν), but plundering clothing and other valuables off dead soldiers was seen as being churlish and womanly (Plato’s *Republic* 469c–d). We also will note (in the excursus) the meaning of the verb

¹⁷ L. Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part Two” *JQR* 83 (1992): 36.

¹⁸ See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:337. See also the excursus. The words *by stealth* remind one of LXX Exod 11:2: “speak *secretly* into the ears of the people.”

¹⁹ Feldman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:403.

²⁰ For Josephus’ understanding of the halakah, see D. Goldenberg, “The Halakhah in Josephus and in Tannaic Literature,” *JQR* 67 (1976): 30–43 and *The Halakhah in Josephus and in Tannaic Literature: A Comparative Study* (Ph.D. diss, Dropsie University, 1978).

σκυλεύω broadened in time to include generally outrageous plundering of dead soldiers—thus taking on a more negative connotation. This is as reflected in its LXX usage which includes the stripping of fallen soldiers of other valuables beyond their arms and armour. It is this meaning that Josephus must have in mind; Moses forbid the Jews from plundering the clothes or other prized items from their dead enemies. Josephus places this specific biblical proscription in a context of Moses' laws against unnecessarily vicious actions which occur in times of war (burning up the countryside, cutting down fruit trees, outrages against prisoners of war and women).

A. Kasher understands this passage (particularly 2.211) as a response to the kind of calumny found in Juvenal's fourteenth satire.²¹ In this passage (paragraph 103–4), Juvenal observes that children typically learn vice from their parents and that bad examples are particularly passed on from one generation to the next through familiar example. He claims that Jews learn from their parents to look down upon Roman law and custom and to honor the law of Moses which commands that Jews neither provide assistance to non-Jews if they are lost nor to even give them water to drink. Juvenal's calumny does not mention outrages during wartime, but it does fall into the general impression Josephus is seeking to address: Moses' laws seek to advance gentleness and humanity generally. For Josephus, this includes humanity extended to an enemy vanquished in battle.

Josephus also associates with the virtue of justice the responsibility to tell the truth; hence, Josephus takes great pains to explain instances of apparent deceit in the Bible. Moses, he claims, has not in any way deviated from the truth (*Ant.* 4:303). Moses is commended for not claiming as his own the advice given to him by his father-in-law (*Ant.* 3:73–74) and for not ascribing Balaam's prophecies to himself (*Ant.* 4:157–8). Also, Josephus' portrayal of Israel's enemies is noteworthy for us. All of them are their most bitter enemies (*Ag. Ap.* 1.70). They are completely out-of-control when it comes to lust for a beautiful woman (*Ant.* 1.162). Their religion is in such disarray that only Abraham was able to deliver them from their dilemmas (*Ant.* 1:166).²²

²¹ A. Kasher, *Neged Apion* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisra'el), 2:507 quoting from Juvenal, *Saturae*, XIV. This passage comes from the fifth book of Juvenal's Satires which is dated to c. 128–130 (see Peter Green's Introduction to Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires* [London: Penguin, 1974], 14).

²² For more on Josephus' portrayal of the Egyptians, see Spilsbury, *Image*, 114–17.

Josephus is convinced all history is a record of divine providence at work in rewarding the good and punishing the wicked.²³ While Josephus belies in this the influence of the Deuteronomist and Chronicler, these themes are put into use in a unique manner; providence replaces the biblical themes of election and covenant. Josephus speaks of divine providence as *pronoia* which in the *Antiquities* replaces the more deterministic language used in the *War*. Providence works chiefly in those unique and even miraculous events in which the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished.²⁴ History is a series of events that illustrate God's justice and providential concern justice be done. We read in the proem:

On the whole, one who would wish to read through [the scriptures] would especially learn from this history that those who comply with the will of God and do not venture to transgress laws that have been well enacted succeed in all things beyond belief and that happiness lies before them as a reward from God. But to the extent that they dissociate themselves from the scrupulous observance of these laws the practicable things become impracticable, and whatever seemingly good thing they pursue with zeal turns into irremediable misfortunes (*Ant.* 1:14).

This both contains the dominant interpretive principle of the whole paraphrase and a hint as to the manner in which this principle is elaborated. The examples of divine retribution and success granted to the righteous will be "beyond belief" and the wicked will be judged with commensurate completeness.²⁵ Thus, the drama of the biblical story is highlighted and enhanced to furnish suitable illustration of the basic theological principle laid forth in the proem. He repeats this moral principle in the final section of the prologue claiming God gives to those who follow him bliss, but brings the direst calamity upon those who step outside the boundary of virtue (*Ant.* 1.20). This principle and

²³ Understanding Josephus as a theologian is a newer trend in Josephus studies. Per Bilde notes that the attacks against Judaism were aimed not only on political and historical grounds, but animus against Israel came in terms of its religion and its theology. Josephus' defense would of necessity have also been theological (*Flavius Josephus*, 182). Theology in Josephus is not systematic, quasi-philosophical but a literary endeavor which reinterprets traditional narratives into a historical medium. It is this redefinition which lies at the heart of the apologetic process which not only defends against enmity but adapts the tradition to make it attractive and relevant to a new era (Attridge, *Interpretation*, 181).

²⁴ Attridge, "Josephus and His Works," 218. See "Guilt and fate" in Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, 184.

²⁵ Attridge, *Interpretation*, p. 67.

interpretation of the biblical heroes as *exempla virtutis* are for Attridge, the two primary interpretive principles of *Ant.* as a whole.²⁶ Providence is understood in terms of an alliance that God grants to those he favors (*Ant.* 2.332). “Providence consists, in other words, of God, the divine βοηθός (331, 332) granting His aid to certain favored people, in this case the Israelites.”²⁷ Israel as a covenant or chosen people is understood by Josephus primarily in these terms; God’s care for Israel is a particular instance of his general *modus operandi* in relating to the world.²⁸

Hellenistic historians saw their work as a service to providence, but they did not elevate the complex of theological themes in the way Josephus did. Particularly, the importance of a specifically religious response (εὐσέβεια) to the facts of providence transforms the genre of antiquarian, rhetorical historiography into a particularly Jewish version of it. He successfully transformed the Greek literary genre into a profoundly religious Jewish interpretation of history. In this way, Josephus responded to the destruction of the temple, reconciling this historical fact to the hope that the promise of scripture remained valid. He proclaimed through the categories of the Greco-Roman environment, the enduring values of Jewish tradition and the lessons to be learned from their history.²⁹

We turn now to examine the texts which treat the biblical despoliation. These have been carefully chosen in such a way as to convey Josephus’ conceptualization of scripture reflected through the prism of Greek terminology and motifs. Several tendencies or patterns of thought become apparent when we compare what Josephus wrote about the despoliation of Egypt to the septuagintal exodus narrative. Again, our study will focus on the following questions. First, how does he apply the sacred tradition to his present circumstances? That is, how does he apply the text to life yet stay rooted in the biblical meaning? This will occupy the lion’s share of our time. Second, how did the exegete apply previous interpretive traditions? Finally, what is common and distinctive about what Josephus says?

Concerning the first question, we have already pointed out that the hostilities of the Jew-haters often expressed itself in their bizarre claims about Moses. Since he was the only Jew broadly known in the pagan

²⁶ Ibid., 67–69.

²⁷ Ibid., 78.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

²⁹ Ibid., 182–4.

world, Josephus sought to improve the status of the Jews in the eyes of his gentile audience by exalting the glory, virtue and perfection of Moses. In the case of Gen 15:14, it is safe to say if we only had Josephus' version of the Abram's covenantal sacrifice, we would know nothing of this despoliation of Egypt prediction because Josephus completely excises any reference to it. In *Antiquities*, where Josephus describes the covenant renewal of Gen. 15, we read:

A heavenly voice came announcing that his descendants would have evil neighbors for 400 years in Egypt (LXX Gen 15:13 simply says ἐν γῇ οὐκ ἰδίᾳ), and that after enduring suffering among them they would overcome the enemy and, conquering the Chananaians in war, would possess their land and cities (1:185).

That Josephus completely omits the judgment promised to Egypt and the rewards to Israel (Gen 15:14) is interesting primarily because Josephus could have used this theme as a test case. As noted, providence judging evil and rewarding the righteous is a primary unifying principle to Josephus' history as a whole. Just a few lines above God commends Abraham for his virtue and promises him that he would not lose his rewards for his good deeds (1.183). Yet here, when he would have had textual warrant for pointing out the justice of providence, he passes it over in silence. The problem presented by the passage outweighed any benefit to be gained.

Not only this, Josephus paraphrases the biblical story both before and after verse 14, and as he typically does, he fills in the narrative with details from elsewhere in the Bible. In the biblical story, Abram is promised that his descendants will experience: 1) Gen 15:13, oppression in a land not their own, 2) Gen 15:14 divine judgment (κρινῶ ἐγώ) upon their oppressors involving an exodus with great possessions (μετὰ ἀποσκευῆς πολλῆς), and 3) Gen 15:15–16, after the death of Moses, in the fourth generation, they will return to Canaan (ᾧδε). Simply put, Josephus paraphrases and expands one and three, but completely skips over two, the very verse that illustrates his basic theme for the whole history! For this reason, we expect the exclusion was deliberate.

We are next interested in how Josephus describes the burning bush incident, since this is where Moses first hears of God's plans for the plundering of Egypt (*Ant.* 2:264–276). Again, the biblical verses Exod 3:22–23 are completely passed over. We might expect to encounter it after the revelation of the divine name in 276. Again, that Josephus expunged the despoliation from the burning bush story so completely

is noteworthy because there are themes of divine judgment in the text which could have played heavily in the advancement of Josephus' favorite theme: divine providence as seen in judgment on the wicked and success for the righteous. In LXX Exod 3:20 we read καὶ ἐκτείνῃς τὴν χεῖρα πατάξῃ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς θαυμασίοις μου. With the emphasis on the wickedness of the Egyptians noted above, one would imagine Josephus attracted to these themes since we have the justice for the Egyptian oppressors (in verse 20) and the divine promise (δώσω χάριν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ—verse 21) in close proximity. Yet Josephus not only says nothing about the promise of favor associated with the despoliation, his only mention of the wickedness of Egypt comes in 268; the speaking flame bid Moses return to Egypt, to act as commander and leader in order to liberate his kinsman from “the insolence there” (τῆς ὕβρεως τῆς ἐκεῖ τοὺς συγγενεῖς ἀπαλλάσσοντα).³⁰ Throughout the passage, Josephus directs all his interpretive skill magnifying the greatness of Moses: his surpassing goodness and good-breeding (267), his coming glory and honor (τοῦ θεοῦ συμπαρόντος—268), and his military and leadership acumen (268). The judgment on Egypt, the favor upon the Judeans, and the despoliation of Egypt are all lost in the glimmer of the glory ascribed to Moses.

Not only is the despoliation of Egypt not mentioned, we also see that Moses is never told to say to Pharaoh, πορευσώμεθα οὖν ὁδὸν τριῶν ἡμερῶν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ἵνα θύσωμεν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν (LXX Exod 3:18). Josephus will not have Moses involved in the deception of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. When the Josephan Moses is told to go before Pharaoh, he is to seek the complete and final deliverance of Israel. This alteration is carried out almost completely. During the plague of lice (*Ant.* 2.300–302), we have a feature which is incongruent with the story as Josephus is telling it. After the lice had ceased (302), Pharaoh changed his mind and decided to hold back the women and children as pledges of their return. This makes sense in the biblical story since Moses only directly asks for time to go three days' journey to offer a sacrifice, and it is the assumption throughout that Pharaoh expected the Hebrews to return. Holding back women and children as a pledge of return in Josephus makes little narrative sense and indicates that he

³⁰ Feldman notes that Josephus envisions Moses' role as a purely military one (*Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:209).

did not fully excise the deception motif from his story. As Josephus interprets, Pharaoh didn't change his mind because his heart was hardened (Exod 8:19) but because he "angered God even more, thinking that he would deceive His providence, as if it were Moyses but not He who was punishing Egypt on behalf of the Hebrews."³¹ Where the Bible presents God and Moses deceiving Pharaoh, Josephus has Pharaoh trying to deceive God.

In *Ant.* 2.307, Pharaoh insists that the Hebrews leave their cattle behind because all of their Egyptian herds had been destroyed.³² Again, this makes no narrative sense in Josephus, but is a carry-over from the biblical deception motif which Josephus does not completely expunge. Yet, if there was every any doubt that Josephus wants his reader to understand that Moses is unambiguously asking for full manumission from slavery, in ¶ 309 Moses asks Pharaoh, "How long will you disobey the will of God? For He orders you to let the Hebrews go, and it is not possible for you to be relieved of these sufferings otherwise than if you do these things." What we have seen thus far is that Josephus mostly expunges the deception of Pharaoh, a fairly important theme in the biblical narrative, from his version. Some of what he includes is logically incoherent in this new context; there could be no point of holding back pledges of return if Moses has been unequivocally asking for emancipation all along.

In keeping with Josephus' approach to the story, the despoliation does not appear between the 10th and 11th plagues as it does in Exod 11:1–2 (cf. 311). The biblical despoliation of Egypt only receives attention in one paragraph yet it is transformed beyond all recognition.

καὶ Μωυσῆν καλέσας ἐκεῖνος ἀπιέναι προσέταξεν, εἰ τῆς χώρας ἐξέλθοιεν παύσεσθαι τὴν Αἴγυπτον κακοπαθοῦσαν ὑπολαβών, δώροις τε τοὺς Ἑβραίους ἐτίμων, οἱ μὲν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τάχιον ἐξελθεῖν, οἱ δὲ καὶ κατὰ γειννιακὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς συνήθειαν.

³¹ Feldman notes the Stoic appeal of the wording: "he exasperated God in thinking to impose upon His providence (πρόνοια), as though it were Moses and not He who was punishing Egypt on the Hebrews' behalf" (*Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:219).

³² It is after the plague of darkness—not locusts—that the biblical Pharaoh holds back the cattle as a pledge (Exod 10:24). Josephus seems to be retelling the story from memory without consulting his text.

And he, calling Moyses, ordered him to depart, supposing that if they would go out from the place the sufferings of Egypt would cease. They honored the Hebrews with gifts, some in order that they might depart more swiftly, others from neighborly relations with them (*Ant.* 2.314).

First, and most obviously, there is no indication here that either God or Moses commanded the despoliation to occur. God's role is highlighted in Exod 3:21–22 (the providential plan) and 11:2 (the specific command). Moses' obedience and the people's compliance is recorded in Exod 12:35–36. In Josephus' version there is no revealed divine plan to plunder and no Hebrew involvement in carrying out the scheme.³³ The treasures given were given freely at the Egyptians initiative. As Feldman notes, by presenting the despoliation as gifts given without asking, Josephus resolves the problem created by the impression that the Israelites, instigated by their God, asked to borrow gifts they knew they couldn't return.³⁴ Secondly, the narrative comment in Exod 12:36, "And so they plundered Egypt" does not find its way into Josephus' version of events. This is, of course, tied logically into the way Josephus set up the story up until this point. Since the Egyptians had known all along of Moses' true intentions, there is no sense in which they could have given loans. Since what was given was indeed a gift, it could not be understood as 'plunder.' Lastly, Josephus does not describe what was given in any detail. He doesn't mention vessels of silver and gold and clothing. He simply says they honored them δώροις.

Josephus claims that all the gifts given were given as a means of showing honor. When he uses the verbal form ἐτίμων, he probably did so with the biblical words καὶ κύριος ἔδωκεν τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐναντίον τῶν Αἰγυπτίων (LXX Exod 12:35) in mind. All the Egyptians who gave gifts did so to honor their departing friends, but there were two distinct motivations involved. Some gave to speed up their departure

³³ It is possible here that we are dealing with the principle of κατὰ τὸ σιωπώμενον (in accordance with what is silently passed over). In other words, oftentimes, commonly known details of stories were left unmentioned in the retelling on the assumption that the reader (or hearer in this case) will know that they are to be assumed. This principle would apply to the Jewish readers, but for the non-Jews, who we have seen are Josephus' primary target audience, these exclusions are significant; they change the coloration of the story in their hearing, and in most if not all instances, this would be their primary exposure to the biblical story.

³⁴ *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:219.

(οἱ μὲν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τάχιον ἐξελθεῖν).³⁵ The fear generated by the death of the firstborn—mentioned in the previous paragraphs—motivates the desire to see the Judeans leave quickly. Here, LXX Exod 12:33, καὶ κατεβιάζοντο οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τὸν λαὸν σπουδῇ ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῆς γῆς stands in support of this exegesis. The other group is said to have given gifts from the genuine feelings of neighborly friendship (οἱ δὲ καὶ κατὰ γεινναικὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς συνήθειαν). The biblical warrant for this is LXX Exod 3:22 (αἰτήσῃ γυνὴ παρὰ γείτονος καὶ συσκήνου αὐτῆς) and 11:2 (αἰτησάτω ἕκαστος παρὰ τοῦ πλησίον καὶ γυνὴ παρὰ τῆς πλησίον). Because they asked their neighbors for these gifts, Josephus may assume the gifts were given due to such warm neighborly feelings and goodwill.

Yet, even though there are some biblical warrants for both these motivations described, the biblical text never makes an association between the motivations—to speed up departure or to express friendship. Yet this very connection had already been made by the midrashic interpreters. A discussion of the meaning of וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ of Exod 12:36, reads:

Rabbi (Judah the Prince) says: What does the Bible say about when they were living in Egypt? “A woman shall ask of her neighbor and of her who is visiting in her home” (Exod 3:22), showing that they were visiting together with them. What does the Bible say about them when they ceased from bondage? “And each man asked from his friend” (11:2), showing that they were their friends. And concerning the time they were released from servitude, what does the scripture say concerning them? “And they made loans to them” (12:36). What they loaned them, they (the Hebrews) wouldn’t touch, and they (the Egyptians) were insisting that they take the goods against their wishes, showing that they feared them as people tend to fear their masters.³⁶

³⁵ In reference to the phrase, “some in order that they might depart more swiftly,” Feldman writes, “Nodet (*ad loc.*) notes that the view that the Egyptians sought to have the Israelites depart more swiftly corresponds to the LXX’s translation (Exod. 12:39) that the Egyptians actively cast out the Israelites, whereas the Hebrew text reads גָּרְשׁוּ, ‘they were cast out’” (*Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:223). There is a typographical error here; the Hebrew reads גָּרְשׁוּ (pual—they were cast out), not גָּרְשׁוּ. Also, while the LXX reading (perhaps with the understanding the verb is a *qal*) translates actively with the supplied—yet contextually obvious—subject (ἐξέβαλον γὰρ αὐτοὺς Αἰγύπτιοι), even with the MT reading, the Egyptians were the instigators who hurried the Hebrews out of Egypt. There is no necessary connection between the LXX active translation and the Josephan, “that they might depart more swiftly” as is claimed. As we note, it is likely that Josephus has Exod 12:33 in mind.

³⁶ Bo 12:35–36. This translation follows the edition of J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melammed, *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Shim’on b. Joḥai* (Jerusalem: 1955, repr. Jerusalem 1979), 31.

Both the motivations of gifts given in fear and gifts given in love are included in this midrash. The midrash claims the friendships inferred by Exod 3:22 and 11:2 justify the interpretation of the phrase וישאלום as “and they asked them to take.” That is, not only was what was taken not borrowed, it was taken under compulsion (cf. *Ant.* 4:296 above). There are also several other similar passages in rabbinic literature (b. *Ber.* 9b, Mek. *Piskha* 13).³⁷ In all these, for a variety of different reasons, the gifts were given to urge them on their way and were almost pressed upon the Hebrews against their will. It is without a doubt that Josephus drew upon such midrashic traditions in his presentation of events (Question 2 above). These verses in context provided the requisite scriptural warrant to transform the biblical story from despoliation by deception into gifts given in haste (please leave quickly!) and friendship (please have a nice journey). But all was given out of a sense of honor and respect for their departing associates.

How did Josephus hope these textual manipulations would influence his readership, both in terms of the friendly and neutral non-Jews who were his primary audience? We see both a defensive and offensive element in his interpretive agenda and both strategies have importance for both of the key groups in view. Most of the interpretive machinations of our texts are, of course, defensive, but we actually see Josephus moving on the offensive at least at one point. On the defensive side, Josephus contended with two different sets of issues. The most pressing was the popular conceptions of Moses and the Jews. Josephus is trying to do damage control in answering the charges raised by the likes of Apollonius Molon and Lysimachus; Moses was a fraud and a charlatan whose commandments taught vice but not virtue (*Ag. Ap.* 2:145).³⁸ Josephus knows of perceptions abroad that the Jews had been stealthy temple-robbers during their exodus from Egypt.³⁹ We have noted that Pompeius Trogus, who was generally friendly to the Jews, claims that the Jews carried off *furtively* the sacred vessels of Egypt. Josephus’ problem was that there were known traditions abroad in the gentile world that the Jews stole Egyptian temple treasures when they left Egypt.

³⁷ Noted by Feldman (*Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 3:219–25).

³⁸ While Josephus wrote *Against Apion* after *Antiquities*, these kinds of calumnies were broadly known, and Josephus certainly knew about them before he did his research in preparation to write *Ag. Ap.*

³⁹ In our excursus we noted Manetho’s charge in *Ag. Ap.* 1:249.

Traditions such as this one, and indeed this tradition itself, fueled the rivalry which often made life difficult for Jews who wanted to fit in to the broader culture.

The other field on which Josephus was compelled to play defense was his own sacred texts which seem to be only known indirectly to those anti-Jews. While it was uncommon for the anti-Jewish writers to read the Septuagint, Josephus certainly was aware that in the biblical version of events, the Jews come off rather badly especially in light of public perceptions. The reason for his production of the *Antiquities* as a whole is illustrated by our texts; rather than urge the whole gentile world to simply go read the Septuagint, they needed a newer improved version to present. The primary problem with the Septuagint version is the deceptive borrowing of Egyptian treasures when the Israelites knew they were leaving for good. Besides reinforcing the ‘temple robber’ rumor, this comes off as a terribly shabby treatment of masters for whose manumission required them to respond obsequiously (see excursus). The biblical plundering seems an inappropriately churlish way to treat a defeated enemy.

Defensively, we have seen how Josephus sought to completely excise the deception motif from the story (he was unsuccessful in two points).⁴⁰ Beginning with Gen 15:14, he tells the story so as to remove these unseemly features. By transforming the despoliation into gifts of friendship or fear, Josephus transforms the negative into a positive, for in this way, he contradicts the common view that the Jews are haters of humanity, unsociable and intolerant. These Jews, Josephus claims, were all honored, and some were urged to leave with gifts given out of fear and others gave their gifts from hearts of neighborly love and concern.

⁴⁰ In spite of Josephus’ promise not to omit or add anything to the biblical story (*Ant.* 1:17, cf. 1:5 and 20:261), it is well known that Josephus removes many embarrassing features of Jewish biblical history from his version. Some have argued that, in doing so, he depends upon the ignorance of his readers, the difficulty of procuring a manuscript and looking up a reference without an index. Others see his claim as a stock formula with little meaning. Feldman argues that Josephus saw himself as carrying on the tradition of the Septuagint in rendering the Bible for Gentiles. This task included not mere translation of text but also the liberal clarification of it. He didn’t see what he did as “adding or subtracting” but of interpreting the essential message for Gentiles. See L. Feldman, in “Mikra in the Writings of Josephus” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. M. Mulder, Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 466–69. Perhaps in something of a “less-is-more” mentality, Josephus believed that by leaving out the elements of the biblical story which were likely to be troublesome or perplexing to Gentiles (especially if he was not able to provide an apologetic defense), he was assisting the Gentile in understanding the essential message of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This would have benefits for both the friendly (to solidify their support) and neutral non-Jews (to prevent them from sliding into a anti-Semitic perspective). These early Judeans were not deceptive temple robbers but honored yet departing guests and friends.

Josephus' transformation of the story brings into tension two fundamental interests in Josephus. Negatively, Josephus wants to defend against the anti-Jewish slander. Positively, he presents Jewish thought and history as relevant—primarily as an example of divine providence calling all to piety—and useful for all those who love learning. In this case, Josephus chose to ignore the positive aspects of the story in terms of its potential to exemplify providence and justice (the evil Egyptians got their just desserts).⁴¹ That Josephus passed up this opportunity indicates the degree of sensitivity to these charges and misperception of the Jews and their ancestry in the environment. Josephus found it more helpful to write providence and divine justice out of the story, and re-write it as an indication of the respect and love felt by ancient Egyptians for ancient Israelites.

Josephus does go on the offensive by morphing Moses into a perfectly virtuous military genius and Pharaoh into a person who arrogantly attempts to deceive providence itself. Again, this had benefits for both groups of persons in view. For those with a positive interest in Judaism, Josephus sought to limit the corrosive effects of the anti-Jewish defamations on their goodwill, to encourage their friendliness, and perhaps even to win them over to the Jewish fold. For those neutral to Judaism, Josephus seeks to explain the biblical text so that the charges brought against the Jews would be neutralized and perhaps they would move toward a more positive relationship with the Jews. In all cases, his offensive apologetic seeks to earn greater social standing for the Jews of his day by using all of the resources available: the Septuagint and Midrashim shaped to fit Hellenistic social mores and ideals and the literary genre of apologetic historiography.

Finally, what is unique about the interpretations of Josephus (question three above)? We have already seen that the despoliation as 'gifts for departing friends' or as 'gifts to urge friends out the door' was known in the midrashic literature, and probably we can assume, in the homiletic traditions of the synagogue. We have also seen other examples of Moses' exaltation. Common also is the theme that the despoliation 'just

⁴¹ Compare to the "Divine Vengeance on God's Enemies" interpretation taken by the writer of *Jubilees* (14:14 and 48:18–19).

happened' without divine planning or human participation. Josephus clearly drew upon midrashic traditions concerning the giving of *bon voyage* gifts by their Egyptians friends. The manner in which Josephus transformed the negative factors into positive ones is unique; not only did the Jews and their God not deceive the Egyptians, but the wicked Pharaoh tried to deceive the virtuous Moses and even providence itself. Also unique is the manner in which Josephus wove together the biblical story and the midrashic interpretations of it into the genre of apologetic historiography.

EXCURSUS:
THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE
'FAIR WAGE' INTERPRETATION

This study has thus far shown that, while there is little evidence that the anti-Jewish writers had direct contact with the biblical story of the despoliation, we have clear evidence of indirect contact, and that this gentile awareness and usage of the *spoliatio* tradition motivated and shaped the Jewish response. One could expect that the anti-Semitic writers cited at length by Josephus in *Against Apion*, with all their animus against the Jews, would have taken the time to read the Septuagint and base their accusations upon the Jewish sources themselves. But there is no evidence that they did actually know the biblical story firsthand; at least, there is no evidence that they knew and exploited the biblical despoliation traditions directly. The third-century Manetho may have written before he had access to the exodus story in Greek seeing that he flourished during the rule of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 B.C.E.) when the Pentateuch itself was being translated.

According to Manetho (*Ag Ap.* 1:228–251), the exodus was led by a rebel priest of Heliopolis named Osarsiph who changed his name to Moses. Having formed an alliance with the Solymites, the descendants of the Hyksos, Moses was initially victorious over Egypt which he viciously pillaged (1:249) before he was expelled by Amenophis. The specific language Manetho used of this pillaging, as it is quoted by Josephus, follows.

καὶ γὰρ οὐ μόνον πόλεις καὶ κώμας ἐνέπρησαν, οὐδὲ ἱεροσυλοῦντες οὐδὲ
λυμαινόμενοι ξόανα θεῶν ἠρκοῦντο...

Not only did they set cities and villages on fire, not only did they pillage the temples and mutilate the images of the gods,...

Manetho goes on to describe the offensive behavior of the Jews under Moses saying that they defiled their sanctuaries, slaughtered sacred animals and humiliated Egyptian prophets and priests. There is no indication of any direct contact with the biblical description of the exodus here, yet the similarity of this version in Manetho to the relatively

¹ Josephus, *Ag Ap.* 1:248–251 (Thackeray, LCL).

positive (that is, not anti-Jewish) Pompeius Trogus is striking in that both of them refer to a plundering of temples as having occurred during the exodus. Of Moses, Pompeius says,

Becoming leader, accordingly, of the exiles, he carried off by stealth the sacred utensils of the Egyptians, who, trying to recover them by force of arms, were compelled by tempests to return home.²

Our key phrase “He carried off by stealth the sacred utensils” (*sacra Aegyptiorum furto abstulit*) is thematically similar to the ἱεροσυλοῦντες of Manetho, and could reflect a common tradition. The same tradition seems to be operative when Lysimachus claims that Jerusalem was originally called “Hierosyla” (‘temple robbery’) because of Jewish “sac-rilegious propensities” (*Ag. Ap.* 1.311). Artapanus, as we have seen, also provides the reason for the Egyptian pursuit of the escaping Hebrews; they wanted to retrieve what had been stolen from them.³ It is possible this was an accumulation of older traditions concerning Egypt’s other enemies retrojected back upon the Jews.⁴ But while these may be little more than bloated rumors several generations removed from the Bible, they provide evidence that there was knowledge of the despoliation abroad, and it was this garbled knowledge to which the Jewish writers are responding. Philo, as we have seen in *Moses* 1:141, in noting how the Jewish accusers claim that the Jews plundered Egypt out of sheer avarice, provides further evidence that non-Jews were aware of the despoliation tradition at least indirectly, and that they made use of this knowledge in their anti-Jewish disputations.⁵ David Winston writes,

These citations all clearly imply that the Israelite borrowing of gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians had been a special target of the polemical and anti-Semitic literature of the Greco-Roman age and that Jewish writers found it necessary to provide some sort of apologetic defense.⁶

² Translation by Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:337.

³ Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.27.35; Fragment 3:35 in Holladay’s *Fragments*, 223.

⁴ Goodman and Schürer note that the common notion that Moses led a group of lepers out of Egypt may have been an older Egyptian tradition about the expulsion of a defiled people that was transferred to the Jews at a later stage (*History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:601. Stern proposes that the temple-robbing tradition arose under the influence of the Egyptian’s later experience with their Persian enemies (See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:340). It is more likely, however, that we are here dealing with the Gentile misunderstanding of the later interpretive tradition that the vessels taken from Egypt were used to construct the wilderness tabernacle.

⁵ E. Stein writes, “Auch aus der einschlägigen Stelle bei Philo hört man die judenfeindliche Anklage klar heraus.” “Ein jüdisch-hellenistischer Midrasch über den Auszug aus Ägypten,” *MGWJ* (1934): 571.

⁶ Winston, *The Book of Wisdom*, 220.

The theme of the Jewish desecration of the Egyptian temples appears also in other Alexandrian accounts of the Exodus. Knowledge of it may have been spotty (Artapanus implies it was known in Heliopolis but not Memphis—see above) and only indirectly associated with the biblical text, but it was still a charge which was best associated with the plundering of Egypt of Exod 12:35–36. It was also a charge which demanded a response.

And yet, the interests of ancient interpreters were not merely apologetic. While the Septuagint presented public relation problems for the synagogue, issues such as the despoliation of Egypt presented interpretive questions within Judaism itself. The 'fair wages' interpretation was, in part, an internal response to the discomfort felt by Hellenistic (or Palestinian Jews, if the tradition has its beginnings in Judea) Jews as they read of their ancestors secretly making plans to borrow Egyptian treasures on a massive scale. They knew all along that they would never return the items borrowed from their feckless neighbors. It is even more morally challenging to believe that a morally perfect God had orchestrated this whole event. We can, therefore, propose two tracks or levels of interest in the ancient interpreter, the homiletic and the apologetic.⁷

Theodoret in the introduction to *Questiones in Octateuchum* explains that the central purpose of explaining the difficult passages of scripture was for the benefit of the masses and this battle of interpretation was not merely a discussion of technical matters of interest to scholars and theologians. Theodoret writes,

Καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν φιλομαθεῖς ἄνδρες ἐπηγγείλαντο διαλυῖσαι τῆς θείας γραφῆς τὰ δοκοῦντα εἶναι ζητήματα, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀναπτύξαι τὸν νοῦν τῶν δὲ τὰς αἰτίας δηλῶσαι, καὶ ἀπαξασπλῶς ἀποφῆναι σαφῆ τὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς οὐ τοιαῦτα φαινόμενα . . . ἰστέον δὲ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ὡς οὐχ ἅπαντες σύμφωνον ἔχουσι τῆς ἐρωτήσεως τὸν σκοπὸν, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν δυσσεβῶς ἐρωτῶσι, διελέγχειν οἰόμενοι τὴν θείαν γραφὴν νῦν μὲν, ὡς οὐκ ὀρθὰ παιδεύσαν, νῦν δέ, ὡς ἐναντία διδάσκουσιν. οἱ δὲ φιλομαθῶς ζητοῦσι, καὶ ποθοῦσιν εὐφεῖν τὸ ζητούμενον. κάκείνων τοίνυν ἐμφράζομεν, σὺν θεῷ φάναι, τὰ βλάσφημα στόματα, τῆς θείας ἐπιδεικνύντες γραφῆς καὶ τὴν συμφωνίαν καὶ τὴν ἀρίστην διδασκαλίαν.⁸

⁷ V. Tcherikover has noted that it is likely many Jewish apologetic works have an internal function and were directed not so much at Greeks but at the Jewish Diaspora community itself who found it easier to cling to Judaism as long as they could be convinced that Judaism was on equal footing as Hellenism, "Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered," *EOS* 48 (1956) 169–193.

⁸ The introduction to *Questiones in Genesin*, lines 1–5. For the Greek text in critical edition, see N. Marcos and A. Sáenz-Badillos *Theodoretī Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (Madrid: Textos Y Estudios «Cardenal Cisneros», 1979) 3.

Other men who love learning have promised to explain those things which seem to be problematic in the divine writings to unveil the meaning of some passages and to explain the causes of other passages, and to make clear, once and for all, so that the masses can understand, the things that do not appear clear... It should be known above all other things that not everyone has the same perspective on this question. Some men ask questions out of impiety supposing that they can find fault with the sacred scriptures, now as if it has taught that which is wrong, and now as if it has taught contradictions. But others inquire out of the love of learning, and they long to discover the answers to the problematic passages. Concerning the former category we will now stop up, to speak with God,⁹ the blasphemous mouths by showing the unified and noble teaching of the divine scripture.

Theodoret claims, with others who love learning, to be able to answer the technical problems posed by impious critics of the sacredness of scripture in a way that is helpful to masses. In the following, we wish to examine just why the biblical story of the despoliation of Egypt would have caused both an interpretive difficulty and a homiletic challenge within the church and synagogue. What about the story posed problems for the average believer in Alexandria? What were τὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς οὐ τοιαῦτα φαινόμενα?

We must begin by remembering that the hermeneutic tendency to justify sacred texts has a parallel in the Hellenistic interpretation of Greek literature especially in relation to the interpretation of Homer. We find in Homer a tradition so secularized, irreverent and disillusioned that the gods could be used for comic relief. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* received a position of honor in the Greek psyche that made more acute the discomfort felt by readers of such passages. The laughter elicited by these works had to be made compatible with the dignity of the divine and the respect due the text itself.¹⁰

There were inconsistencies between Homeric and Hellenic beliefs and behaviour, which shocked educational reformers from Xenophanes and Heraclitus at the close of the sixth century, to Plato in the fourth; and there were others which became apparent in the Alexandrian age, when the dynasties of the Succession Kingdoms had made Greeks more familiar with the behaviour proper to King's courts than they had been since the time of Croesus.¹¹

⁹ Theodoret is alluding to Rom. 3:19 ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῇ. To speak with God is to allude to the scriptures.

¹⁰ R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian; Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 11–12.

¹¹ J. Meyers, *Homer and His Critics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 26.

Odysseus was a beloved trickster and his reputation as such was well-known.¹² The moral implications of the trickster-motif were increasingly frowned on, and later interpreters, particularly those from the stoic interpretive traditions, re-interpreted the whole story to loftier ends.

Socrates, in Plato's *Republic*, was scathing in his critique of Homer, condemning the poet for his deleterious influence on subsequent readers. In his discussion of the education of the young guardians of the state, he claims that the myths of Homer ought to be rejected not simply because they are lies, but because they are *ugly* lies which distort that about which they speak (*Rep* 377a and e). Old myths ought to be abolished and new ones made up which follow certain basic principles (τύποι) set by lawmakers (379a–c). These new myths should have beneficial effects on the young, making them honor the gods and take their friendships seriously (386a). This critique of Homer stands behind Heraclitus' defense of Homer in *Homeric Allegories*. He condemns Plato and insists on the superiority of Homer.¹³

A tendency either to sanitize Homer on the literal level or to allegorize towards something useful in the education of children becomes pervasive in the Hellenic world. On the literal level, passages rejected on moral grounds were often just as easily defended on the same moral grounds provided one had paraphrased and interpreted them rightly. For instance, Helen was demonstrated to be innocent of causing the Trojan War, or Athena is exonerated for the crime of Pandarus.¹⁴ The second exculpatory method is an allegorical interpretation which seeks to 'heal' the moral challenges presented by the literal reading. Allegorical interpretation solves the problems of a text by claiming, "While it appears to be saying X, it is really saying Y." It is often associated with the Stoics, but it was probably a feature of pedagogic explication of Homer as early as the fifth century.¹⁵

The LXX seems to heighten the trickery feature of the biblical story (adding 'in secret' in Exod 11:2), and surprisingly express little concern over the moral difficulties present in the text. Perhaps the original translators expected the story to be read and known only within the

¹² This is reflected in the first line of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus is called πολύτροπος. This should be translated "man of many moves," thus reflecting the ambiguity between two possible meanings, either "much traveled" or "of many wiles." See W. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* (Surrey: St. Martin's Press, 1959), 206.

¹³ Meyers, *Homer*, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ R. Lamberton and J. Keaney, *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xiii.

synagogue where the joke on the Egyptians of old could be appreciated without condemnation. Their approach refuses to alleviate this moral problem on the literal level, and in fact, seems to have strengthened it. Later interpreters were uncomfortable with the trickery of the septuagintal story, and we have seen the methods by which they interpreted on a literal level to alleviate the difficulties with which the LXX *spoliatio* motif presented them. Roman juridical practice required proof of premeditated intent on the part of the deceiving party, evidence which could easily have been attained from the biblical story and which the septuagintal version only seems to underscore.¹⁶ Since this process of text-sanitation through interpretation was already a commonplace in the Hellenistic world (where there was certainly no anti-Greek slander based on Homer's excesses), that it occurred within Judaism can be understood as an interior interpretive tendency and not only the result of exterior pressure.

It is also possible that the moral difficulties with which the text presented them were aggravated by social conditions of the period in which the later interpreters lived. The *Letter of Aristeas* (24) claims to contain a decree of Ptolemy Philadelphus by which over one hundred thousand Jewish slaves were emancipated. Those who freed their slaves were promised to receive 20 drachmas for each slave (22). Even if this letter were rejected as a forgery (it is probably not), it still speaks of historical realities of the Ptolemaic period. While this probably does not reflect a typical slave sale price, the writer more likely conceived of it as a concession made by the government to former owners for their financial loss.¹⁷ This amount may have been suggested by the customary sale tax imposed upon slaves freed by the process of emancipation (the *vicesima libertatis*).¹⁸

The Jewish readers of the Septuagint in Ptolemaic Egypt would have been particularly sensitive to this issue especially after this letter went into circulation in the mid-second century. Since the letter purports to tell the story of the translation of the Septuagint itself, it has particular relevance here. Certainly it was well-known in the Jewish community of Alexandria in the period after which it was written. The polite treat-

¹⁶ B. Rosenfeld and J. Menirav, "Fraud: From the Biblical Basis to General Commercial Law in Roman Palestine," *JStJ* 37.4 (2006) 623.

¹⁷ W. Westermann, *Upon Slavery in Ptolemaic Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

ment of Philadelphus toward the slave owners who were required to give up their property and the means of income it assured could not but have been contrasted to the shabby treatment of the Jews (and their God) toward their Egyptian owners. They ought to have provided them with some token of appreciation for their loss as had the gracious Philadelphus. Instead they left with essentially stolen goods since they never intended to return the borrowed property they had taken with them. This highlighted the moral conundrum which this story presented and from which they sought to escape.

It is also possible that the biblical story of despoliation would have been seen as a particularly egregious flaunting of custom and propriety by readers in Roman Egypt where manumission carried with it certain social obligations toward the previous master.¹⁹ The duties (*obsequium*) owed by a freedman to his former master are similar to those a child owes to his/her father. A manumitted slave was in no sense independent of their previous owner but took on social and economic obligations to them. Wiedemann quotes Ulpian: "Provincial governors must listen to complaints by patrons against their freedmen and not deal lightly with them since a freedman who does not show due gratitude should not be allowed to get away with it."²⁰ Also from Ulpian: "The figure of father and patron ought always to be respected and sacred in the eyes of a freedman or a son."²¹ In the face of these social obligations, the plundering becomes particularly noxious. Gratitude is obligatory to one's former master who, by emancipation, becomes a patron and ought to be treated like a parent. The Jews ought to have treated Pharaoh with *obsequium*, but instead they showed the ultimate form of disrespect by robbing him through deceit on their way out the door. This problem cried out for interpretation so that the faithful could be edified rather than dispirited.

A final factor may have accentuated the moral problem presented by the text. The term used for 'plunder' in the LXX Exod 3:22 and 12:36 is σκυλεύω, the nominal form of which is σκῦλα (typically appearing in the plural). Both the verbal and nominal forms had a very

¹⁹ On the continuing obligation a freed slave owed to their former master, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14, 53, 69 and 161, n. 84.

²⁰ T. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 53.

²¹ Ibid.

specific meaning in classical literature, which only later in antiquity came to mean ‘booty’ in a general sense. Originally, σκυλεύω referred specifically to the commonly-known convention by which the captured battle-gear of the defeated enemy (σκῦλα) was consecrated and stored in the halls and shrines of the victors. Σκυλεῖν was to strip the corpses of a defeated foe *only* of their weapons and armor, and to take those weapons, consecrate them to the gods, and store them in their halls and shrines. Whereas other spoils of the enemy became the profits of war, captured armor was not reused or sold although in the hour of extreme need it might be used to rearm the people.²²

The typical meaning of σκυλεύω in the Septuagint is not so specific and conveyed ‘to plunder’ or ‘take booty’ generally.²³ We see this broadening of the meaning of σκυλεύω and σκῦλα toward general ‘booty-taking’ or ‘pillaging’ in 1–2 Maccabees. The term refers both to *both* the pillaging of civilian sites and to the stripping of military implements from a dead enemy.²⁴ It is difficult to say in the later case whether or not this stripping included more than arms and armor, but several verses in II Macc 8 would indicate that the stricture of taking only arms and armor was not being followed or somehow didn’t apply. After the Maccabean victory over the army of Nicanor, we read (II Macc 8:27a–28)

²² W. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (5 vols., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5:132. Interestingly, there was little condemnation of booty-taking in the ancient world. The economic gain that resulted from war, including the acquisition of land, slaves, and any other plunder, along with revenues were considered to be the natural results of victory. See W. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 56 and C. Préaux, *Le Monde Hellénistique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), 1:366–370. She notes, “Aristote (*Politique* 1256 B) compte la guerre parmi les techniques économiques naturelles d’acquisition” (1:367).

²³ It is used in the general sense, as “booty,” 27 times, and once in the narrow sense of stripping dead enemies of their weapons. Its general usages are Exod 3:22; 12:36; II Chr 14:13 (12), 14 (13); 20:25 (three times); 25:13; 28:8; Jdt 2:27; 4:1; 16:5; Wis 10:20; Hab 2:8 (twice); Zech 2:8 (12); Isa 8:3; Ezek 26:12; 29:19; 30:24; 38:12, 13; 39:10; I Macc 3:20, 5:68, 11:61; II Macc 9:16. In one very interesting usage, I Chr 10:8–10, the Philistines (being from the Aegean basin) strip Saul and his army of their arms what appears to be traditional Greek fashion (vs. 8 καὶ ἦλθον ἀλλόφυλοι τοῦ σκυλεῖν τοὺς τραυματίας... καὶ ἔλαβον τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ... vs. 10 καὶ ἔθηκαν τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ αὐτῶν).

²⁴ Σκυλεύω is used to refer to the pillage of non-military locations in I Macc 3:20; 5:68; 11:61, II Macc 9:16. The nominal form has a civilian reference in I Macc 1:3, 19, 31, 35; 2:10; 5:28, 35, 51, 68; 9:40; 10:84, 87; 11:48, 51. Σκῦλα is used in a strict military sense in I Macc 3:12; 4:17–18, 5:3, 22; 6:6; 7:47; 12:31.

ὀπλολογήσαντες δὲ αὐτοὺς καὶ τὰ σκῦλα ἐκδύσαντες τῶν πολεμίων... μετὰ δὲ τὸ σάββατον τοῖς ἠκισμένοις καὶ ταῖς χήραις καὶ ὀρφανοῖς μερίσαντες ἀπὸ τῶν σκύλων τὰ λοιπὰ αὐτοὶ καὶ τὰ παιδιά διεμερίσαντο.

When they had collected the arms of the enemy and stripped them of their spoils... After the Sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and distributed the rest among themselves and their children (NRSV).

Our writer here uses the term σκῦλα to refer to what was taken from their dead foe after (or in distinction from) the taking of weaponry. For the taking of arms, he uses the rare word ὀπλολογήω.²⁵ Because traditional σκῦλα (as military equipment) would have been of little help to those in need or to children, the distribution of this σκῦλα to the poor and children in II Macc 8:28 entails that the term now has a broader meaning. It refers to all kinds of booty whether taken from a slain army (as is the case here) or from destroyed villages. Of course, we encounter the broader meaning of σκυλεύω in LXX Exod 12:36.

In Plato's *Republic* 5.469C–D, in a discussion between Socrates and Glaucon concerning the proper conduct of soldiers toward enemies in battle, Socrates expresses a prohibition against despoiling those who fall in battle of anything but than their weapons.²⁶ One ought not strip the dead enemy soldiers of their clothes or other valuables, only their arms. To do otherwise was not only illiberal and greedy, the fear of being stripped naked and plundered destroyed the courage of armies generally. To Socrates, and Glaucon concurs, it seems womanish and petty to plunder the body of a dead corpse when the real enemy has fled.²⁷ In *Rep.* 5.470A, Plato took a dim view of the Greek habit of dedicating weapons in temples since it discouraged friendly relations between

²⁵ Liddell and Scott list only its usage here and in Philo; see *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Revised by J.S. Jones, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1240. It is likely that since the term *skuleuō* no longer had the distinct meaning of "stripping of arms and armor," this newer term was coined.

²⁶ Τί δέ; σκυλεύειν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τοὺς τελευτήσαντας πλὴν ὅπλων, ἐπειδὴν νικήσωσιν, ἢ καλῶς ἔχει; This passage occurs in a digression on war (471c–474b) in which certain rules are laid down to humanize the strife of Greek against Greek warfare. Socrates then moves on to the larger question of the practicability of the idea state. See R.C. Cross and A.D. Woodzley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 135.

²⁷ In Xenophon's *Hellenica* 2.4.19 Thrasybulus and his friends, after their victory over the thirty tyrants, τὰ μὲν ὅπλα ἔλαβον, τοὺς δὲ χιτῶνας οὐδενὸς τῶν πολιτῶν ἐσκύλευσαν. C. Brownson adds the note, "The victors, then, appropriated the arms and armour of the dead, but not their clothing," (Xenophon, *Hellenica Books I–IV* [Browston, LCL]) 155.

the states. Cicero, in *De invent.* 2.70, claims that for the Greeks to set up memorials of their disputes with other Greeks in such a way is not right. Diodorus tells of the Phokians whose arms, upon their defeat, were not dedicated but destroyed since they had committed a sacrilege against Apollo (16.60.3).²⁸

While the plundering of Egypt, as presented in the Septuagint, clearly didn't involved any illicit stripping of corpses of slain enemies, the final phrase καὶ ἐσκύλευσαν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους (LXX Exod 12:36) painted the whole story as something on that order. It is especially important here to remember that the biblical text repeatedly states that the escaping slaves stripped the Egyptians of their clothing (ἱματισμόν in LXX Exod 3:22; 11:2 and 12:35). Alexandrian readers of the Septuagint may have realized that this taking of valuables and especially clothing of Egyptians comes off as something on the order of an illicit plundering of dead corpses (behavior womanly and petty in the opinion of Socrates and Glaucon).

These factors make even more likely the claim that the traditions which sought to justify the Septuagint's presentation of the despoliation functioned with interests which went far beyond apologetic. The despoliation tradition would have created discomfort in the minds of the synagogue worshippers even if there was no tension between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. We are dealing here with a homiletic tradition which intended to edify the faithful every bit as much as it intended to defend the faith. The long-standing practice of interpreters of the Hellenistic/Roman period to expurgate the morally problematic passages in their cherished texts (literally or allegorically), the possibility that the problem presented by the *spoliatio* tradition was aggravated by the social practices and mores of the Ptolemaic/Roman period, and the fact that the biblical despoliation comes off as something akin to the illicit stripping of dead corpses, make it likely that we have more in view here than apologetic hermeneutic. If the anti-Semites had never heard of the despoliation of Egypt, the Jewish interpreters would have come up with the 'fair wage' justification just the same.

²⁸ For more examples, see Pritchett, *The Greek State*, 5:132.

PART TWO

RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS

MIDRASHIC PONDERING THE PLUNDER

Few passages in the Hebrew Bible have caused more embarrassment for Jewish and Christian commentators than those which recount the plundering of the Egyptians (Gen 15:14; Exod 3:21–22; 11:2–3 and 12:35–36). The defensive posture taken by many does not flow simply from their own embarrassment about the manner in which these stories put their ancestors and their God in a bad light.¹ What is said in some cases is a direct apologetic against the detractors of Jewish or Christian faith who used these very passages as proof either that the God of the Israelites was demonic (a central tenet of Gnosticism) or that the religion and character of the Jews (and Christians by extension) was inferior and despicable. Several rabbinic (see below) and patristic (Tertullian's *Marc* 2:20) passages imagine actual Egyptian attempts to seek remuneration for their valuables stolen during the despoliation. Tertullian's argumentation against Marcion indicates that the Gnostics (or at least the Marcionite Gnostics) were using the despoliation of Egypt as a test case to prove the moral inferiority of the Hebrew God, a central tenet of their *gnosis*.² There are, therefore, two issues at stake with which the Rabbis contended. First, does Exodus describe a case of fraud whereby the Jewish people absconded with borrowed Egyptian goods (the standard anti-Jewish rhetoric).³ Second, does this prove the moral inferiority of the Jewish God (the Gnostic claim)?

This chapter will outline various strategies in midrashic literature by which the point of the dagger was either embraced or blunted. In fact, the texts can be placed into these four general categories: 1) texts which embrace the moral problem, 2) texts which provide a defense for the actions of their ancestors and their God, 3) texts which turn vice into virtue by finding what is admirable in the passages and bringing this to

¹ The word 'ancestors' here applies to Christians only insofar as they understood themselves to be grafted into the Israel of faith (Rom. 2:28ff.).

² S. Pétremont claims that the unifying characteristic of all Gnostic sub-groups was the belief in a fundamental distinction between the good God of the Gospel and the evil God of the Old Testament (*A Separate God* [trans. C. Harrison, New York: Harper, 1984], 9).

³ Childs, *Exodus*, 175.

the foreground, and 4) texts not concerned with the above-mentioned ethical problems.

Our methodology will again seek to examine the tension between the biblical text and its interpreted meaning, to isolate how each text draws on previous exegesis and to determine what is unique to each midrash. We will seek answers to several questions as to the role this text played in its historical context. Was this interpretation intended to be used apologetically—a public response to the gnostic challenge—and if so, would it have been effective? Or was it a response to the demand for reparations made by Egyptian anti-Jews? Or did it seek to glorify Israel's ancestors to counteract the anti-Jewish slanderous claims? Because of the large number of texts to be examined, our present study is constructed as a broad survey of rabbinic exegetical options rather than as a detailed examination of the progression of a particular midrashic concept.

I. TEXTS WHICH EMBRACE THE MORAL PROBLEM

Four texts comprise this category: ExodR (Bo) 14:3, ExodR (Beshallah) 21:5; and EstR 7:13 and Mek (Piskha 13).⁴

The Ninth Plague and The Plundering

The context of ExodR 14:3 treats the plague of darkness. The critical portion can be translated as follows.

Now during the three days of darkness, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians so that they made loans to them. For an Israelite would go into the homes of the Egyptians and would see in the homes vessels of silver and gold and clothing. If they (the Egyptians) would say, "We don't have anything to loan to you," the Israelite would say to them, "Look, here it is in such-and-such a place." At that time (later during the exodus), the Egyptians were saying, "If they wanted to deceive us, they would have taken them during the days of darkness, and we would not have known it. Look, they already saw the items previously. Since they didn't touch them without our permission, in the same way, they will not hold on to them (that is, fail to return the items we loan them)." So they loaned them their belongings. This hap-

⁴ All abbreviations will follow those in Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 373ff.

pened to fulfill what Scripture says, “And afterwards, they will come out with great provisions” (Gen. 15:14).

The narrative logic of this story is a bit tricky to unravel. The midrash is based on the idea that the Israelites, during the days of darkness, had light wherever they went, so that an Israelite could walk into an Egyptian home and see clearly, even though the Egyptians were unable to see. The textual key to the midrash is the unexpected meaning for the suffix ‘their’ in the claim that all the Israelites had light in *their* dwellings (Exod 10:23—**במושבתם**). If the *their* refers to the homes of the Egyptians, as this view claims, the Israelites could see even outside of the land of Goshen and in the homes of the Egyptians. If the Egyptians were blind and the Israelites could see, they could easily make away with whatever they pleased, leaving the Egyptians completely vulnerable. The Israelites proved themselves to be fully trustworthy by not taking advantage of their situation, and thus they attained favor in the eyes of the Egyptians.

This midrash conflates the stories of the plague of darkness and the plundering so that it could be paraphrased *God gave the Israelites favor in the eyes of the Egyptians during the days of darkness with the result that, (during the exodus) they continued to loan them their belongings*. In this case, it functions as an introduction to what follows; the Israelites did not steal Egyptian goods even though they could have done so with impunity. The point of the story intends to explain the means by which God gave the Israelites favor; they won the trust of the Egyptians during the days of darkness, a time of particular Egyptian vulnerability.

A shorter version of this idea is found in Mek (Piskha 13) as a saying of R. Jose the Galilean explaining the biblical phrase *And the Lord gave the people favor...*, “They (the Egyptians) trusted them (the Israelites) on account of the three days of darkness saying, ‘If when we were in darkness and they in the light they were not suspect, shall they now be under suspicion?’” On one level, these stories seem to fit into category 3 above, in that they make a virtue out of a vice. The Israelites won the respect of the Egyptians, such that they were willing to give them their treasures. If the stories implied that this respect motivated the Egyptians to give of their treasures free and clear, as is the case elsewhere, this would be true. But the opposite is the situation here. Because of the respect won by the Israelites in the days of darkness, the Egyptians are certain that the Israelites can be trusted *not* to make away with the valuables they have been loaned. The narrative logic of

the story demands that the Egyptians loaned their goods. Otherwise, the trust the Israelites attained would make no sense. As such, this passage embraces and even accentuates the trickery involved. The Egyptians were *not* giving their treasures away free and clear. God's collusion in the fraud is embraced by this passage; God brought it all off to fulfill his promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:14).

Perhaps these passages could be understood as an attempt to justify the plundering (category 2). If the Egyptians were overly trusting because of their previous experience such that they foolishly gave up their treasures, the plunder might be seen as justified in some way (the Egyptians got what they deserved for their naiveté). Perhaps this midrash wants us to understand these Egyptians as having been so trusting that they didn't work out the details carefully enough. The biblical text can be read to mean either that the Israelites asked to borrow the treasures, or that they asked for them as gifts. The Egyptians didn't take the time to figure out which was which, and, because of their experiences with the Israelites during the ninth plague, they assumed that the Israelites were wanting loans and that they could be trusted. Thus, they gave their wealth freely on loan. In fact, they were being asked for gifts. The Israelites did not realize the confusion on the part of the Egyptians and thus were not morally responsible. In other words, the Israelites thought they were being given gifts, but the Egyptians thought they were making loans.

If this is the case, this passage attempts to justify the action. However, one would expect this line of reasoning to be more explicit. It simply demands that one read too much into the text. One cannot help but wonder: What is the literary function of such a tradition in the rabbinic community? As it is, this passage seems an almost Odyssean kind of reveling in the deception, and thus it accentuates and embraces the plundering with all its moral dubiousness and duplicity perhaps in terms of divine providence and vengeance. These passages are unique in the manner in which bind together the biblical claim of favor received with the behavior of the Israelites during the plague of darkness. These midrashim seek to explain the question arising from the biblical narrative, "Exactly how did God arrange the giving of favor to our ancestors?" The midrash does not seek to justify the despoliation in the face of the anti-Jewish or gnostic challenges but instead accentuates the trickery involved.

An Anti-Semitic History of Israel

The third text which embraces the moral problem is EstR 7:13. This is a fascinating midrash which presents us with insight into the way in which the history of Israel may have been retold from the anti-Semitic perspective. The haggadic midrash is an expansion on Est. 3:9, "If it please the King, let it be written that they be destroyed." Although Haman beseeches King Ahasuerus to exterminate Israel, the king is unwilling to do so, because he knows how the God of the Jews has treated the previous kings who have mistreated them. But at Haman's insistence, the King calls his magicians and advisors and asks them to advise him concerning Haman's request. These wise men not only know their Hebrew Bible, but they interpret it in typical rabbinic fashion to show that the world survives only through the merit of Israel and their keeping of the law. The Israelites are the firstborn sons of God, and the pagans are estranged from God. They point out that God has severely punished both Pharaoh and Sennacherib for their mistreatment of God's people.

Haman counters that, because God was unable to do anything about Nebuchadnessar, he must have become old and impotent. Haman also has a biblical text to make his case (Ps. 94:7)! With this, the advisors come around to Haman's opinion, and support his plan. They then compose letters to this end. The text of this letter is provided, in which an anti-Semitic version of the history of Israel is recounted with remarkable force. The Jews are a haughty, ungrateful and malevolent people who seek the destruction of other races. The story of the Exodus is told as a case in point. The critical portion is as follows.

Take for instance poor Pharaoh. What did they do (to him) when they went down to Egypt? He received them with a hospitable attitude. He had the people settle in the best part of the land, and provided for them during the years of famine and fed them with the best food in the land. He had palaces to build and they were building there. With all this, he was unable (to gain their loyalty).⁵ Not only that, but they came to him in trickery (בעלילה) and they said to him, "We will go three day's journey to sacrifice to Adonai our God, and afterwards, we will return. If you please, loan us vessels of silver and gold and clothing." And so they loaned them

⁵ It is likely that something has dropped from the text at this point. The Hebrew has *בכל זאת לא היה יכול להם*. A. Cohen in the Soncino edition translates, "With all this, he was not able to make them loyal." He suggests 'subdue' in the margin as a possible meaning (*Midrash Rabbah* [vol. 8, London, 1939, repr. 1971] 94).

their silver and gold and the nicest clothes they had. And every one of them (the Israelites) loaded up as many donkeys as he had. There were more than one could count. The end result was that they plundered the Egyptians, as the Bible says, “And they plundered the Egyptians” (Exod 12:36). And when Pharaoh heard that they were fleeing, he went after them to retrieve his money (ממון).

Pharaoh is the tragic protagonist, whose trust and helpfulness is abused. The trickery of Moses comes off as knavish fraud in Haman’s letter. This midrash makes explicit the deception involved in the request to go offer sacrifices to God in the desert by the addition *and afterwards, we will return*. The quantity of valuable items taken is grossly exaggerated. The Egyptians give all the gold, silver and nice clothing they possess. The Israelites have donkeys without number fully loaded to make away with their loot. When Pharaoh realizes that the Israelites have ungratefully taken advantage of his good graces and that the slaves had no intention of returning with his valuables, he makes chase after them, not so much to re-enslave them, but to retrieve his stolen property!

What is remarkable about this passage is the force with which it presents the anti-Semitic version of the exodus. It, of course, fails to mention that Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites and compelled them to do hard labor under the worst of conditions, or that he murdered their firstborn sons. According to the version presented here, Pharaoh received the people warmly, settled them in the best part of the land and provided food for them in the time of famine, as if the Pharaoh of the Joseph story and the Pharaoh of the exodus were the same person. The Israelites were only asked to help him build a few palaces—hardly much to ask in return. Yet in the face of all his kindness, they deceived him, took the Egyptians’ money and made escape. While this version of the story is not true to the biblical text, it is in fact much closer to the biblical version of the exodus than the scurrilous anti-Semitic versions of the exodus collected by Josephus in *Against Apion*. There, Moses led a group of Egyptian lepers who had been expelled from Egypt, among other things, for the contagion they were spreading (*Ag Ap.* 1.230–50 [Manetho], 288–92 [Chaeremon] and 305–7 [Lysimachus]). It is well known that these anti-Jewish accounts of the exodus had virtually no direct contact with the biblical version (non-Jews in the Greco-Roman period didn’t read the Septuagint), although there was some indirect knowledge of it, especially in terms of the despoliation of Egypt (see excursus).

Yet this tradition, hailing from a much later period, if it is other than the fabrication of Rabbis, reflects a vastly increased knowledge

of the biblical account than earlier anti-Semitic versions.⁶ Yet, it also has connections to earlier midrashic interpretation. We noted in the excursus that Artapanus and Pompeius Trogus have Pharaoh chasing after the fleeing Israelites to retrieve stolen goods. Philo, in *Moses* 1:141, has the plunder of Egypt carried out on the backs of beasts of burden, similar to here, an interpretation that exaggerates what was taken from Egypt. These are the only two points of contact with other traditions of possible non-Jewish origin.

This begs the question: What is the literary purpose for the construction of this version of the exodus in this context? In *Ag Ap.*, Josephus preserves the slander in order to refute it and to defend his people. But there is no direct response to the version preserved here, though there hardly needed to be. Placing these traditions in the letter inspired by Haman is refutation enough. But is it possible that these stories of deception and trickery still were intended to traffic in and draw forth a certain dark pleasure, much like the tales of Odysseus? Perhaps the reader is expected to revel in their victory, morally dubious as it was, by thinking, “We got the best of them and they still haven’t gotten over it.”

Perhaps the purpose of this story is to offset the egregious nature of the crimes committed by the Jews against their enemies toward the end of the book of Esther. The description of the request to slaughter the Jews as a *minor matter* (שאלה קטנה) earlier in the letter may also play a role here. In other words, if the Persians under Haman’s influence could consider the destruction of the Jews as a minor request, and if they could so convincingly and so deceptively manipulate their sacred story so as to put the Jews in such a bad light, the Jews were justified in taking the actions that are described at the end of the book of Esther. These traditions may have intended to present Jewish history in the worst light possible, to accentuate their enemies’ anti-Jewish hatred, a hatred which was so malevolent as to justify the extreme measures taken.⁷ If this is correct, the above text doesn’t so much embrace the moral problem of the biblical story as it embraces the anti-Jewish version of the moral problem. It intends to make known the way in which their sacred story had been unfairly and malevolently manipulated.

⁶ EstR II (Chapters 7–10) mixes old and new material and has been dated as late as the eleventh century (Strack and Stemberger *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 319). Of course, this particular midrashic tradition may be much earlier.

⁷ This explanation was suggested to me in a personal conversation with Dr. David Weisberg of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion.

As such, it also minimizes the moral problem (Category 2), not that of Exod 12:35–36, but the moral problem stemming from the horrific ending of the book of Esther. In any case, it is likely that this text does not preserve the Gnostic position so much as that of anti-Semites in general, seeing that there is little interest here in proving the moral inferiority of the Hebrew God. The focus here is on the haughtiness and bellicosity of the Hebrew people.

II. TEXTS WHICH MINIMIZE THE MORAL PROBLEM

These texts can be subdivided by their various claims: a) the plunder was fair wage or back-payment for slavery, b) Pharaoh was a fool and the despoliation was his just desserts, c) the treasures were not loans but gifts given free-and-clear, d) the plundering was an act of justified vengeance, e) there is no sense in being overly apologetic with nothing to apologize for, f) the treasures of Egypt were ours to begin with, and g) it all worked out in the end.

Backwages for Slaves?

Four texts fall into the first category: Tan 4:8, GenR 61:7, b. Sanh 91a and Yalqut Shim'oni Hayyei Sarah 154. The GenR, Yalkut and Sanh texts are parallel traditions. GenR will serve as representative. All texts place the debate about the plundering of the Egyptians in an imaginary legal context: Alexander of Macedon is the judge, the Egyptians are the plaintiffs, and the Jews are the defendants.

The Egyptians said, "We are making our claim against them on the basis of their own Torah. 600,000 men went up out of our land loaded up with vessels of silver and gold, as it is said, 'and they plundered the Egyptians.' Let them give to us our silver and our gold." Gebiah the son of Kosem said to him, "O King, 600,000 men worked for them 210 years, some of them were silversmiths and goldsmiths, who should receive as their wage a dinar per day." The mathematicians sat down and figured it out and they had not come to 100 years before the land of Egypt was found to be in forfeit, and so they left in disgrace.

The clothing is not mentioned as part of the plundered treasure. As we shall see, there are other midrashim in which the clothes are the most valuable items taken; here they seem not worthy of mention.

Several competing elements of interest come to the fore. Because Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 2.20:1–3) specifically claims that Egyptians

had by his time actually sought reparations from the Jews for the despoliation of Egypt, we have reason to believe that these texts reflect such events. At least, Tertullian saw this tradition as an historical witness to events in the recent past. The whole event was set back in the period of Alexander as if to say, "This matter has already been handled definitely and authoritatively." Yet this argument could hardly have been taken seriously at all as an actual legal case. The Israelites were slaves, and slaves are not paid wages, much less back-wages according to either Greek or Roman law (see excursus). No attempt is made to show that the Israelites were unjustly enslaved and thus deserving of back-wages. As we have seen above, Watson draws attention to a passage in Pomponius Sextus which clearly implies that even in a time of peace, a person who has been captured by the Roman state becomes licit property of the state if he or she was a member of a community that had no official ties or treaties of hospitality with Rome.⁸ No such claim is here made, as it seems to be made when Tertullian, possibly drawing on this very tradition, advances his case in *Against Marcion* 2:20. If this case was presented in a court of Roman law, Gebiah would have come off very badly. In the Sanh version, Gebiah tells the Sages, when he asks for permission to provide defense for the Jews, that if he is defeated, they should say that they have merely defeated an ignorant man. In an actual court of law, this is exactly what would have transpired. For this reason, we must assume that this tradition was meant for in-house consumption only.

Second, these traditions indicate that the Egyptians did not give these gifts away free-and-clear, but that the treasures were borrowed items which were never returned. The moral justification in this case only emerges in the broader picture since the stolen goods were only a small portion of the compensation for unpaid labor due them. At any rate, this argument would have had very little impact on the anti-Jewish audience who could simply point out its flaws as above. As such, the text seeks to answer the challenge of the Egyptians to receive remuneration for their lost wealth. It does not seek to justify God in the face of the gnostic challenge since the text does not seek to exonerate God's character. However, its use in Tertullian's *Against Marcion*, a clearly anti-gnostic text, proves its usefulness in that arena,

⁸ Watson, *Roman Slave Law*, 20. For a fuller discussion of this passage, see above "Philo's *Life of Moses*."

especially after the argument had been tightened to fit the requirements of Roman legal tradition.

Pharaoh Was A Fool

Tan (Buber) *Beshallah* 4:8 (par. PRK 11:3) seeks to explain the triple punishment of Pharaoh (plagues, loss of treasures, loss of slaves). This is perhaps an attempt to answer a gnostic claim that Pharaoh's punishment was excessive, a triple jeopardy of sorts. In the midrash, his excessive punishment comes as the result of his own foolish obstinacy. A parable is told in which a king asks a servant to buy him a fish. The servant returns with a rotten fish. The king gives the servant his choice between three punishments: eat the fish, pay for it, or be flogged with one hundred lashes. The servant, because of his foolishness and obstinacy, ends up undergoing all three. The passage continues,

So it was with Pharaoh. His enslavement of Israel in Egypt was excessive. The Holy One said to him (in Exod 5:1): *Let my people go*. He said (in Exod 5:2): *I do not know the LORD*. He brought ten plagues (*makkot*) upon him, but he did not let them go. The Holy One said to him: By your life, you have to give them compensation. Thus it is stated (in Exod 12:36): *And the LORD gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians to give them loans. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians*.⁹

The implication is that if Pharaoh had cooperated, one of these punishments should have been enough. But due to his stubbornness, he brought all three upon his head.

Compensation in this context makes more sense than above because we are not dealing with human forensics but divine justice. The punishment is God's compensation for the excesses of the enslavement by the Egyptians. Here, compensation can be demanded as divine punishment for slavery especially since the enslavement was excessively cruel. However, as the text reads, it is possible that the goal of the passage is not to directly answer the Gnostic problems related to the plunder of the Egyptians, but to answer a Gnostic charge that God was excessive in his punishments of Pharaoh generally. Its interest in the plundering of the Egyptians is tangential. It is surprising that the image of the divine courtroom as the setting for the adjudication of the grievance

⁹ Translation of J. Townsend, *Midrash Tankhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes, S Buber Recension* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 1997), 2:79–80.

was not used by the Rabbis to greater effect. It seems the logical way to shore up an otherwise weak case. And even with this in play, one cannot help but imagine that the Gnostic would respond saying, “How is God justified to compensate past wrongs by being deceitful and committing fraud?”

Bon Voyage Gifts

The general tradition that the Egyptians gave their gifts voluntarily—something on the order of bon voyage gifts to their departing friends—has a long history that first appears in Josephus *Ant.* 2:314, as we have seen. In the rabbinic literature, this tradition takes many forms. Both Mek (Pischa 13) and MRS (Bo 12:35–6) illustrate one variety. The portion from MRS which treats the biblical phrase וישאלום is particularly apt.

Rabbi (Judah the Prince) says: What does the Scripture say about when they were living in Egypt? “A woman shall ask of her neighbor and of her who is visiting in her home” (Exod 3:22), showing that they were visiting together with them. What does the Scripture say about them when they ceased from bondage? “And each man asked from his friend” (11:2), showing that they were their friends. And concerning the time they were released from servitude, what does the Scripture say concerning them? “And they asked them to take (וישאלום)” (12:36). What they asked them to take, they (the Israelites) wouldn’t touch, and they (the Egyptians) were insisting that they take the goods against their wishes (בעל כורח), showing that they feared them as people tend to fear their masters. Also they were saying, “Soon the people will see them in the desert and will say, ‘Look how rich these Egyptian slaves are!’”¹⁰

The point is clear: the Egyptians were on very friendly terms with the Israelites. Their friendship turned into respect and awe as the plagues progressed. The passage goes on to describe how one Hebrew escapee would have been able to pay for the expenses of the tabernacle and its furnishings. This exaggeration emphasizes the friendship and respect the Egyptians had for the Israelites expressed in abundant gifts.

The fear mentioned perhaps reflects Exod 12:33 where the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave quickly lest they all die. Yet the Bible does not present this as a motivation for the giving of these gifts. This

¹⁰ My translation follows the Hebrew text of J. Epstein and E. Melammed, *Mekhilla d’Rabbi Shim’on b. Yochai* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1955, repr. Jerusalem 1979), 31. See also above, Josephus *Ant.* 2.314 (p. 168).

midrash claims that there really was no despoliation; what was given was given free and clear. The Israelites only took the spoils when they were pressed even against their will (see also b. Ber. 9b below).

The notion that the Egyptians pressed their treasures on the Israelites against their will is drawn from the *hiphil* inflection of the verb which is construed here as *to insist that one take*. The friendship and respect of the Egyptians toward the Israelites explained their extreme generosity in giving things for which the Israelites never asked. Apart from this, the Egyptians had ulterior motives for their generosity: they wanted others to see just how wealthy their slaves were. Those who did would be inclined to draw the conclusion that the wealth of Egypt was vast. So not only were these gifts of good-will and respect, they were given out of vanity. What we have here is a hodge-podge of motivations: friendship, fear and vanity. But in all cases, the Israelites didn't ask and weren't interested; the Egyptians insisted on giving (for whatever motivations) and thus Egypt was not plundered. There are several goals for these interpretations: to exonerate Israel, to remove any question of reparations, and to increase the glory of their ancestors in answer to the anti-Jewish traditions which defamed them.

A different tradition is operative in the sayings of R. Ishmael and R. Nathan in Mek (Piskha 13) under the heading *And the Lord gave the people favor*. In this case, there is no hiding the fact that the Israelites did indeed ask and want Egyptian treasures, but the Egyptians, because of God's favor, gave them in superabundance. The saying of R. Ishmael is as follows.

That the Lord gave the people favor should be understood in an ordinary sense. He (the Israelite) did not finish saying to him, "Give me" (השאלני) when he (the Egyptian) would bring it out and give (נותן) it to him.

Here, the subject of the verb שאל is not the Egyptians requesting that the Israelites take (as above in MRS), but the Israelites. Under these circumstances, the *hiphil* is simply an intensifier; perhaps the force of divine favor intensified the asking so that it resulted in the giving of what was not asked for. Lauterbach translates השאלני as 'Lend me' which accurately reflects rabbinic usage of the verb in the *hiphil*. However, here and in the midrash that follows, it may be better to translate 'Give me.' The saying of R. Nathan, a little fuller than the above, is as follows.

There is no need to say וישאלום other than to signify that even things the Israelite did not ask for לא שאלו, the Egyptians were urging them

to take **וּשְׂאִילִין אוֹתָם**. The one (Israelite) would say, “Let me have **לִי כֵן וְכֵן** such and such a thing” and the other (Egyptian) would respond, “Take it **טוֹל לְךָ** and another to go with it.”

In this midrash, we are back to the Egyptians as the subjects of the verb **וּשְׂאִילִין**. Lauterbach comments, “Hence, **וּשְׂאִילִין** is interpreted as meaning the Egyptians urged the Israelites to borrow things which the Israelites themselves never asked for.”¹¹ It seems better, as in the case above, to translate ‘to urge to take’ rather than ‘to urge to borrow’ since **טוֹל לְךָ** (the dramatization of **וּשְׂאִילִין**) means ‘take’ not ‘borrow.’ The shift from the *hiphil* of the verb **שָׁאַל** to the imperative *qal* of the verbs **נָתַן** and **נָטַל** implies, this midrash seems to claim, that the Egyptians urged to Israelites to take, not to borrow, their treasures. Also, any form of borrowing leaves the moral conundrum unresolved and this passage clearly seeks to justify their ancestors. Both these passages do have the Israelites asking for gifts of their own volition. Thus, in this case, the Israelites asked for and received gifts, gifts which the Egyptians gave in superabundance. Ginzberg points out that this is the answer found in the responsa literature: God’s command was that the Israelites should solicit gifts, not ask for loans.¹²

That the Egyptians freely gave of their treasures is also the explanation given by Rabbi Eliezer in the context of the same Mek passage above. Through the method of *gezerah shavah*, the favor mentioned in Exod 12:36 is identified with the Holy Spirit as the source of said favor. The Holy Spirit rested on the Israelites such that when they asked to borrow items from the Egyptians (**שָׁאַל**), they were able to tell them just where the items were and the Egyptians would go and give (**נָתַן**) them the items. The Holy Spirit was thus responsible both for the Israelites’ ability to perceive where the valuable items had been stored and for the divine favor whereby the Egyptian gave them their goods freely. Whether or not the Israelites here are seen to be asking for loans or gifts, the point seems to be that they were given gifts. The contextual emphasis on the enthusiasm of the Egyptians in giving away their treasures makes more sense if both verbs **נָתַן** and **נָטַל** are interpreted as ‘to give free-and-clear.’ It is only this understanding that solves the moral challenge of the passage.

¹¹ J. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1933), 1:106, note 8.

¹² L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1910), 5:436, note 233.

In the rabbinic case being presented here, the freedom with which the Egyptians behaved is brought to the fore. The Egyptians acted freely and with their full volition and with enthusiasm such that they gave more than was asked. Mek. represents here a collection of traditions that provide various motivations for the enthusiasm with which the Egyptians gave their treasures. Again, while several motivations are presented, the free volition with which the Egyptians gave is the point.

The emphasis on the volitional gift-giving of the Egyptians may be a specific means of answering Gnostic charges. This is not absolutely clear since there is no other clearly anti-Gnostic element to the passage. But if we assume the passage as an anti-Gnostic purpose, it is difficult to assess whether this argument could have been successful. An antagonist could simply respond: If the Egyptians gave their gifts freely, what does the text mean when it says that the Israelites plundered Egypt? Those who are plundered have not given up their stolen goods freely! If this problem was solved by saying that the word *plundering* is hyperbole, and not to be taken literally, an effective apology could have been put forth. If the gentile interlocutors knew several answers provided, they could have played them off each other by asking: How can the Rabbis claim, on one hand, that the Egyptians brought their case to Alexander of Macedon to retrieve their stolen property, and then claim that the Egyptians gave that property freely? They appear to cancel each other out. However, these arguments seem to primarily be in-house and no such challenge would be expected. Also, this kind of juxtaposition of traditions would have been virtually impossible seeing they arise in different sources at different times. The point here is only that theoretically a knowledgeable Gnostic could have made such a point.

An Act of Justified Vengeance

Surprisingly, there is only one text which places this spin on the story; ExodR 18:8.10.

Israel spread out into all Egypt at that time, as Scripture says, “And the Israelites did what Moses required and asked for loans of the Egyptians.” But Moses was occupied with the bones of Joseph, and with the vessels of the tabernacle which Jacob our father had prepared, and thus David said, “The righteous will rejoice when he sees vengeance” (Ps. 58:11).

This also is compatible with the notion of compensation, and perhaps could be made a sub-category of it. Kasher notes that a midrash on GenR 94.4 stands behind this passage. In this Jacob had prophetically

foreseen that the Israelites would build a tabernacle in the wilderness. When he went down to Egypt he brought the necessary trees for its construction, trees which Abraham had planted at Beer Sheba (Gen. 21:33).¹³ So while Moses busied himself making plans for the tabernacle and collecting the bones of Joseph, the people spread through the land asking for treasures of the Egyptians. Since the preparations made by Moses for the tabernacle can have nothing to do with righteous vengeance of Ps. 58, this biblical text clearly refers to the plundering of Egyptian treasures by the Hebrew slaves (or the death of the firstborn) as the vengeance in which the righteous rejoice. The text cited would have been inappropriate and ineffective for direct confrontation with the Gnostics, but may have been quite effective with the rabbinic students. A Gnostic may have answered essentially with a *two wrongs don't make a right* response. The excessive cruelty of the Egyptian overlords does not justify lying, cheating and stealing under any circumstances. Couldn't God have vindicated his people without stooping to break his own commandments?

It was Ours Anyway!

The following two midrashim come from a section of b. Pesachim 119a which Neusner has called "a meandering composite."¹⁴ I will follow his translation.

Said R. Judah said Samuel, "All the silver and gold in the world did Joseph collect and bring to Egypt (לקטו והביאו למצרים): 'And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan' (Gen. 47:14). I know only (אין לי אלא) about what was in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan. How do I know about that in other lands? (בשאר ארצות מנין) Scripture says, 'And all the countries came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain' (Gen. 41:57). And when the Israelites went up from Egypt (וכשעלו ישראל ממצרים), they brought it up with them (העלוהו עמהן): 'and they despoiled the Egyptians' (Exod 12:36)."¹⁵

The purpose and strategy of this midrash is hardly opaque; it intends to justify the despoliation by claiming that the gold and silver taken from Egypt originally belonged to Israel by associating the plunder of

¹³ D. Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1970), 8:79.

¹⁴ J. Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia: And American Translation Volume IVE: Pesahim Chapters 9 and 10* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1993), 90.

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.

Egypt with the money collected by Joseph in the period of the famine. Not only was money taken from the land of Egypt and Canaan, but, based on Gen. 41:57, R. Judah speculates that Joseph gathered all the silver and gold in the world. This dual strategy also glorifies their ancestors by magnifying the value of what was taken (all the world's silver and gold!). The midrash seems to assume that all the wealth of Egypt had its beginnings in the days of Joseph and when the Israelites made their exit from Egypt and asked their neighbors for their treasures, they were in fact only taking back what originally belonged to Joseph. Assumed here is something on the order of, "The Egyptians took the money of the world from Joseph first; so we only received back what was originally ours."

Israel took all Joseph's money, all the world's money with them. A subsequent play on words makes this clear; the phrase ונצלו את-מצרים is being read by R. Asi as "and they emptied Egypt" (ונצדו את-מצרים) by interchanging the *lamed* with a *daled*. R. Shimon similarly views Egypt like a bird trap (*metzudah*) without any grain and like a fishpond (*metzulah*) in which there was no fish. Both 'trap' and 'pond' are cognates with the above verbs and in context indicate that Egypt was left empty—like an empty trap and empty fishpond. The operative idea here is the notion that Egypt, after the despoliation, had been emptied of all the money of the world which Joseph had procured during the period of famine. This is undoubtedly a playful tongue-in-cheek hyperbole. But this text doesn't seek to answer the ultimate question raised by the Gnostics concerning the morality of the biblical God in the exodus narrative. Even if the money originally came from Joseph, we still have God orchestrating deception and fraud. Yet, if a detractor could have been convinced that this indeed was the case, it would go a long way toward justifying God and reducing the moral problem.

It All Worked Out in the End

The final means to be described here is essentially the claim that the subsequent plundering of Israel's treasures by the Egyptian army negates any need for compensation or apology. Chapter 41 of Aboth d' Rabbi Nathan expounds on Aboth 4:17 which reads, "R. Simeon said: There are three crowns: the crown of the Torah, the crown of the Priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but the crown of a good name excels them all." Paragraph nine reads:

Three things returned to their original place: Israel, Egypt's wealth, and the heavenly writing. Israel returned to their original place, as it is

stated, *Your fathers dwell of old time beyond the River* (Josh 24:2) and it is also stated, *And carried the people away into Babylon* (Ezra 5:12). Egypt's wealth returned to its original place (to Egypt) as it is stated, *And they despoiled Egypt* (Exod 12:36)...and it is also stated, *And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord* (I Kings 14:25f.).¹⁶

It is possible that this midrash understands that Shishak took away the *very* vessels of gold and silver taken from Egypt, since the wilderness Tabernacle, the Temple's precursor, was believed to have been furnished with the gold and silver (and often bronze) taken from Egypt.¹⁷ This being the case, the argument advanced is that the very vessels plundered from Egypt, by the providence of God, have already been returned to Egypt. While this approach doesn't exactly solve the moral problem directly, it resolves it in terms of outcome; God saw to it that the treasures of Egypt were returned. Especially if the Egyptians were seeking repayment for their lost valuables, this line of argumentation could have been effective. It would not, however, completely answer the original charges made by the Gnostics and other anti-Jews, in terms of the question of the morality of the biblical exodus narrative.

B. Pesahim 119a carries this argument in a different direction by claiming that this treasure had no final value (like a pond without fish) since, after it was taken by Shishak from Rehoboam, it was stolen from Shishak by a minor potentate from whom the treasure was again stolen—a succession of robberies prevented the treasures of Egypt from having any real value. The treasures of Egypt made a journey around the world until they ended up in Rome. While both these interpretations take an 'it all worked out in the wash' approach, the second seeks to further minimize the problem by emphasizing the ultimate worthlessness of the treasures taken. Perhaps by claiming that the treasures ended up in Rome, the midrashist is implying that the Romans are the ones who should pay back the riches originally stolen from Egypt! It is hard to imagine this was taken seriously; there is a tongue-in-cheek element to the midrash. Both midrashim appear to have general anti-Jewish sentiment in focus and not Gnosticism in particular. These texts might alleviate pressures put on Jews for reparation. They do not seek to answer the Gnostic challenge per se; God still appears to have orchestrated fraud.

¹⁶ Translation of E. Cashdan, in *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1965), 1:207.

¹⁷ Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*, 325, note 13. See also ExodR 18:18 above.

III. TEXTS WHICH MAKE A VIRTUE OUT OF VICE

This category is not always clearly distinguishable from the previous one, as both try to justify the past. My criterion for this distinction shall be as follows. The texts in this category justify the past by means of an interpretation of the story which highlights the virtue and honor in what transpired. In this way, virtue overshadows vice and the moral tension is assuaged. The texts can be sub-divided into five groupings; 1) texts which emphasize the amazing ability of the Hebrew people to keep a secret, 2) texts which emphasize the ability of the Hebrew people to order their priorities rightly in relation to the items taken in the plunder, 3) a single text which highlights the positive outcome of the Egyptian plunder, 4) texts which claim that the plundering of Egypt was to bring about the destruction of Egyptian idols and 5) the claim that the plundering was necessary as a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Gen 15:14.

Keeping the Secret Secret

In this first category we find the following: Mek (Piskha 5), LevR 32:5, NumR 20:22 and CantR.IV 12:1. All transmit a very similar tradition although in two cases the words are attributed to R. Huna in the name of Bar Kappara (LevR and CantR) and in one case the tradition is attributed to our Rabbis (NumR). Also, NumR cites Exod 3:22 while the other two cite Exod 11:2. The saying of R. Huna from CantR will suffice.

R. Huna in the name of R. Kappara says, "Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of their merit in four cases; they did not change their names, they did not change language, they did not engage in gossip, and none of them was unrestrained in terms of sexual promiscuity.¹⁸ They did not change their names; since Reuben and Simeon went down (to Egypt) and Reuben and Simeon came up (from Egypt). They didn't call Reuben Rufus and they didn't call Simeon Julian or Joseph Listis, or Benjamin Alexander. They also didn't change their language, since elsewhere it is written, "One who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew..." (Gen 14:13). And in this other text it is written, "The God of the Israelites appeared to us..." (Exod 5:3). It is also written, "For it is my mouth that is addressing you, (Gen 45:12)" in the Holy Language. And they didn't gossip, as Scriptures says, "Speak now in the ears of the people

¹⁸ Literally: *unrestrained in terms of their sexual organs.*

that everyone should inquire of his friend..." (Exod 11:2). One finds that this matter was revealed to them twelve months previous, yet there was not found among them one who made it known to his companion. And there was not found among them one person unrestrained in their sexuality, as it says, "And a son of an Israelite woman went out...and the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed" (Lev 24:10), which points out the superiority of the Israelites, for there was not found among them (any immoral persons) but this one, and the Scriptures divulges her."¹⁹

It is fascinating to consider that the very passage that was used by some as the centerpiece of the case for the moral inferiority of the Jews and their God is found here to be proof of the opposite. In fact, it was the ability of the Israelites to not inform on each other that is, not to inform Pharaoh concerning the plan to ask for loans and escape into the desert with their goods, that won them favor with God. God saw fit to redeem them from their bondage, because all of them resisted the urge to divulge the secret for twelve months, even though presumably there would have been financial incentive to do so.

Clearly, the Rabbis read the passages very carefully seeking creatively to find the virtue in the putative vice. The twelve months arise from the notion that the period of the plagues lasted about a year. If God told Moses to announce to the people that they were going to plunder Egypt in Exod 3, before the plagues began, and the plundering eventuated in Exod 12, then the people kept this a secret for at least a whole year. If any one of them had been unable to control their tongue, the plan would have failed—the Egyptians would have been ready for them, and would not have loaned them anything. God's reason for telling them of the plan in advance was a test of their ability to keep a secret, a test which they passed with flying colors.

This interpretation goes against the grain of the biblical text; Moses commanded the Israelites to ask for Egyptian treasures only in Exod 11:2 which takes place just before the first Passover and the last plague. This would only be days before the exodus, not a year before. Moses, according to the biblical text, didn't apprise the people of the plan until the eve of the last plague. When we come to Exod 11, the people still haven't been commanded to ask for loans because Moses needed to be reminded by God about this. We see that the Rabbis are hard pressed to make their case here and play loose-and-free with the biblical

¹⁹ This translation is my own.

story by implying that Moses divulged the plan before the Bible says that he did.

Interestingly, this interpretation also demands that the Egyptian plunder was loaned, not given. For the secret kept concerned the great deception of the exodus; they asked for a few days off work to worship in the desert when the plan all along was to escape. They were to ask for treasures on loan and then were to make their way to freedom. If the goods taken were to be given voluntarily, there would be no need for such secrecy. Again, we see a line of argument that would not play well with the Gnostics or other anti-Semites. Their detractors could too easily point out that the story line of the biblical narrative does not support the Rabbis' view, and that the ability to keep secret a plan of great deception and despoliation is hardly a mark of moral superiority. This tactic would also have been unhelpful with anti-Semites generally; it clearly is intended for the synagogue insider.

The Clothes are Worth Most!

Three texts fall into this category; GenR 60:11, ExodR 3:11 and Mek (Exod 12:36 under **וישאלו ממצרים**). ExodR will provide our representative sample.

The biblical citation "And every woman shall ask from her neighbor and guests vessels of silver and gold and clothing" shows that the clothing was the more valuable to them, for at the time that a man goes out on the road, if he doesn't have proper clothing, he is put to shame. "And you will plunder (*nizzaltem*) the Egyptians;" Egypt in the future will be like a fishpond (*metzulah*) in which there are no fish.

The point of this passage is that since clothing is mentioned last, it is considered the most valuable. Of all the items taken in the plundering, the clothing was the most valuable because it was needed for their journey. We noted above some texts that do not find the clothing to be worth mentioning at all. Yet here, the Israelites cannot be faulted because the clothing they took was needed for the journey. This was their primary aim and that the clothes were the most important to them is proved in that they are listed last in the biblical text. The biblical description of the plundering shows the virtue and prudence of the Hebrew people; they were able to rightly order their priorities.

Typically, in a list, things mentioned first are the most important, but under certain circumstances this can be reversed. In this instance, the latter is the case: the clothes are most important because they were necessary for their trip across the desert. The gold and the silver were

niceties which could have been done without. The general strategy seems here to be to assert that the Israelites did not plunder the Egyptians out of a desire to rob them of their precious metals. They primarily were interested in getting the clothing they needed to survive in the desert. The silver and gold were not very important to them, but were ‘icing on the cake’ so to speak.

This is similar to the theme we have seen above; the Israelites did not plunder the Egyptians to gratify a love of riches and/or were reluctant to take the treasures being offered them. However, nothing was made of the word order or of the relative values of the items plundered. This text does more than deny that they plundered Egypt for the love of riches. It seems to imply that they were the more honorable because they listed clothing last, proving that they valued clothes the most. Such an argument would have done little more than make the Gnostics roll their eyes with dismay. Again, it has little value except when preaching to the choir.

The final sentence plays on the linguistic connection between *niz-zaltem* and *mezulah* (cf. the tradition in b. Pes. 119a). The noun ‘fishpond’ (מצולה) which it seems to mean here, is not, according to Jastow, based on the root verb נצל but צלל. An identical word based on נצל means *refuse, threshed out husks* raising the possibility that we have here a play on words; “Egypt will be a refuse heap/fishpond where there are no fish.” The point seems to be that all of Egypt’s valuables in the future will be completely destroyed, making it a worthless place; a fishpond without fish. It appears to announce an eschatological retribution upon Egypt for their cruelty to their Hebrew slaves. All their wealth will be stripped away.

Chasing the Spoil

In CantR 1:26 we encounter what is the ethical opposite of the above. This passage is a saying of R. ‘Azariah which seeks to explain the meaning of the biblical citation, *Draw me after you, let us run* (Song 1:4). It is interpreted in this context as, *Draw me, we will run after you*. The passage is rendered as follows.

R. ‘Azariah says, “The community of Israel said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, Sovereign of the Universe, ‘On account of the fact that you have given to me the spoil of my neighbors, we will run after you.’ For as Scripture says, “Each woman shall ask of her neighbor” (Exod 3:23). (For the sake of) the spoils of Egypt and the spoils of Sihon and Og and the spoils of the thirty one kings, we will run after you.

This is an ‘ends justifies the means’ explanation. In the rabbinic interpretation, the words **אחריך** are construed with what follows, rather than what precedes. In its biblical context, the words are spoken between two lovers; *draw me after you, let’s run away*. In the rabbinic context, the plural *let’s run away* refers to the community of Israel running after God (**אחריך**), not two lovers running together; thus, *we (the community) will run after you*.

The Rabbis in this context are asking the question, “What is the motivation by which the community of Israel runs after God?” With some creative repointing, they read **מִשְׁכְּנִי** (draw me) as **מִשְׁכְּנִי** (on account of my neighbors).²⁰ Thus they read, *On account of my neighbors, we will run after you*. The *neighbors* connects the passage on the basis of *gezerah shavah* to Exod 3:23 and 11:2. The passage is also applied to non-Egyptians Sihon, Og and the thirty one kings, who, while not Egyptians, were neighbors whose goods were plundered.

In this interpretation, the plunder of the Egyptians and the other neighbors is that which motivates Israel to pursue God, to run after him rather than the other gods. Since, in the rabbinic worldview, this is the highest good and the merit by which the world is sustained, all else is justified. The end justifies the means. The world is sustained by Israel’s pursuit of God which comes as a result of God’s giving them the plunder of their neighbors. The community of Israel did plunder Egypt for the love of riches but this very love spurred them on in their love of God who gave the riches, and thus is motivated the keeping of the *mitzvot*. The plundering of Egypt is justified when one sees the greater perspective and the ultimate good that came from a relative evil.

We may again have a case in which this argument functioned as a sub-point to one of the above arguments. If, for instance, the Egyptians were motivated by the Holy Spirit such that they gave most freely, and even gave more than what the Israelites asked for, these gifts could have spurred the Israelites on to pursue their God, and to observe his statutes. Taken in such a dosage, the Jewish detractors could possibly have been effectively answered. But on its own, this argument would have failed to meet the Gnostic and/or anti-Semitic challenge and there is no clear evidence that these traditions functioned together in such a fashion.

²⁰ H. Freedman and M. Simon, *Midrash Rabbah, Exodus Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 3:44, note 1.

Destroying the Idols

The only text which makes this claim is Mek (Piskha 13) under the heading *And they despoiled the Egyptians*.

“And they despoiled the Egyptians” shows that that their idols melted and ceased to exist (as idols) and returned to their initial state.

This passage seems to be reading the word נָצַל to mean ‘destroy’ rather than ‘despoil.’ While this is not the normal use of the verb in the *piel*, in the *niphal*, the verb can mean, ‘fit for throwing away, decayed.’ If this is indeed the way the midrash is reading the text, the Israelites didn’t plunder Egypt for Egyptian gold but to destroy that which was idolatrous in Egypt. The terms *vessels of gold and silver* in the Bible does not necessarily refer to idolatrous items, but here in this midrash they are taken to at least include idols or idolatrous paraphernalia. Again, we have here an attempt to justify the Israelites’ actions by turning vice into virtue; the plundering of Egypt took place with a view to destroy Egyptian idols, not to acquire wealth. However, we again are dealing here with an argument aimed at their own disciples since such a tack would have come off as tactless to the typical pagan or Gnostic.

Promise to Abram Fulfilled

The Hebrew reluctance to take the treasures of Egypt is also present in b. Ber 9b, where it is emphasized that the Israelites did not want to borrow from the Egyptians and that they were satisfied with their freedom only. Philo also emphasizes that the Israelites did not take Egyptian treasures due to avarice. We have also noted above the commonality with which the pre-rabbinic interpreters presented the despoliation as if the Israelites took but never asked for Egyptian treasures. Here also we read that they simply did not care for riches. God insists that they oblige him and ask for Egyptian treasures so that Abraham would not be able to complain that the promise made to him went unfulfilled (Gen 15:14). The claim made, that the plundering of the Egyptians was necessary as a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, is the main point of ExodR 3:11, which beginning with the Exod 3:21, *And I will give this people favor...* continues in the divine voice.

I said to Abraham, “And after this, they will come forth with great possessions (Gen. 15:14).” In the future I will cause them to be in favor with the Egyptians, so that they will make loans to them and they come away fully loaded, in order that Abraham would have no excuse to say,

“The saying, ‘They will serve them and oppress them’ was fulfilled in their case, but the statement ‘and after this, they will come out with great possessions’ was not fulfilled.”

This argument aims to point out that God was keeping his promise to Abram in ordering the despoliation of Egypt. This proves that God is faithful. Promise-keeping, in itself, is a moral virtue, in spite of the problems relating to how this promise was kept. On its own, this tactic would not hold much sway for the Gnostics, as they could too easily point out that to keep a promise by defrauding someone else is still reprehensible. God’s goodness is exactly the point that the Gnostics were questioning, and this argument does not fully account for the problems being raised.

IV. TEXTS WHICH DO NOT DEAL WITH THE MORAL PROBLEM

The fourth main category above comprises texts which deal with the passages in question without an interest in the moral questions involved.

Plunder by the Sea

There is one main tradition that falls into this category, a tradition which is transmitted in different forms in both Mek (*Piskha* 13)²¹ and MRS (*Bo* 12:35–36).²² In this tradition, the point is made that the plunder of the sea was greater than the spoils in Egypt. In Mek, a collection of verses are provided which list something valuable followed by something more valuable. These are interpreted to support their claim that the second plundering was greater than the first. When the Egyptian army was destroyed at the sea, according to the midrash, their valuables were taken by the Israelites as plunder—a plundering which exceeded that of Exod 12:35–36. A similar tradition in Demetrius the Chronographer (F 5 in *OTP* which is a fragment in Eusebius’ *Praep. ev.* 9.29.16ff.) and developed by Josephus (*Ant* 2:349) apparently sought to answer the question, “How did escaped slaves arm themselves for war in the desert?” by claiming that the Israelites appropriated the arms of the dead Egyptian army at the Red Sea.²³ But the emphasis here is on

²¹ Lauterbach, *Mekhilla*, 1:106.

²² Epstein and Melamed, *Mekhilla*, 32.

²³ The Demetrius passage reads, “Someone asked how the Israelites had weapons, since they came out unarmed. For they said that after they had gone out on a three-day

military weaponry and not treasures of gold and silver. In Ginzberg's explanatory paraphrase, he adds that the abundance of plunder at the sea was due to the fact that the Pharaoh, like all kings, carried the monies from the royal treasury with him on campaigns, in order to be prepared to hire mercenaries in case of defeat.²⁴ It is difficult to see how these midrashim play a role in the above discussion. They are composed merely to advance the legend of the plunder at the sea and to emphasize the magnitude of these treasures and thus the glory of Israel as conquerors of Egypt.

Forced to Say 'Sorry'

Another text which seeks to minimize the moral problem is ExodR 21:5.

So what is the meaning of, "And Pharaoh drew near" (Exod 14:10), but that he brought Israel to (the point of) repentance, which they did. R. Berekiah said, "Pharaoh's attack on Israel was more efficacious (for Israel) than one hundred fasts and prayers. Why? Because when they pursued after them and they (the Israelites) saw them, they were terribly frightened, and they looked for help from on high, and they made repentance, and prayed. As Scripture says, 'So the children of Israel cried out to God (Exod 14:10).' The Israelites said to Moses, 'What have you done to us? Now they are coming after us and are going to do to us all that we have done to them. For we killed their firstborn and we took their money and ran. Didn't you tell us, "And a woman should borrow from her neighbor" and so on?"' (Exod 3:23 or 11:2).

This midrash continues telling that after their attempt to blame Moses for their difficulties ("Didn't you tell us?"), Israel cried out to the Lord in prayer and repentance which was God's purpose for allowing the whole event. When the passage reaches its climax, Exod 14:10 is repeated with the point that Israel had repented fully. Thus, Exod 14:10 both introduces and concludes this midrash. The midrash is seeking to explain the meaning of the hiphil of **יקרב** used in the verb *drew near*. Usually the hiphil means *to bring something else near, to present*. The word is usually found in cultic contexts when an animal is brought near or presented to God for sacrifice. BDB lists only this text as an absolute of person,

journey, and made sacrifice, they would return again. It appears, therefore, that those who had not been drowned made use of the others' arms" (Hanson, "Demetrius," 2:854). This tradition is likely reflected in Wis 10:20a.

²⁴ Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:371.

meaning *to make an approach*. Its biblical meaning in the context of Exod 14:10 indicates a militaristic advance but the object is assumed and not explicit. The verb seems to lack an object. R. Berekiah follows the standard rabbinic practice of filling in what is left out by the cryptic biblical text. He avers that Israel is the verb's object; Israel was brought near to a point of repentance and thus to God, for the biblical verse goes on to say that they cried out to God.

In the midrash, the words *we killed their firstborn and we took their money and ran* are not a confession or repentance mentioned by R. Berekiah in the previous sentence, but a response of fear, anger and unbelief. As the passage is structured, as is not uncommon in rabbinic literature, the first point (R. Berekiah's claim) telescopes the point of the fuller narrative that follows. The main point of the passage is that God used the Egyptian advance to cause Israel to cry out in prayer even though their initial attitude had been fear, anger and self-pity (*we killed their firstborn*, etc.). This passage is perplexing in that, not only do the Israelites complain that they plundered the Egyptians (which they did at God's command through Moses), but they also say they killed the Egyptian firstborn, something for which they were not directly responsible. The claim may be something such as, "Since the Egyptians are angry with us about the death of their firstborn, and now their army is bearing down on us seeking our destruction, we are being held responsible." At any rate, the advancement of the Egyptian army is that which moved them from fear, anger and self-pity to genuine repentance.

The focus of the context, before and after, is clearly upon God's desire to hear Israel repent. God allowed Pharaoh to advance upon Israel because God desired that they cry out to him. In the biblical text, Israel cries to God due to fear (וַיִּרְאוּ מֶאֱדָר Exod 14:10) which is expressed in anger at Moses (vv. 11–12).²⁵ The midrash, in its elaboration and dramatization of the narrative, transforms v. 10 into a pious cry of repentance and confession of sin. But in doing so, it alters the biblical order of events, placing the clearly faithless blaming of Moses first (*What have you done to us?*), even though in the biblical text, the blaming of Moses comes after they cried out to God. The cry to God is transformed from that which is based on fear and unbelief to an act of repentance which wins God's favor. But why this particular charge

²⁵ Propp does not see a duality of sources, as he ascribes both elements to JE (*Exodus*, 462).

against Moses? Why does the midrash have the Israelites claim, even in fear and anger, that Moses made them kill the firstborn of Egypt along with the plundering of Egypt? On one level, this is simply rhetorical hyperbole meant to account for Egypt's angry pursuit. It constitutes simply a mindless lashing-out against Moses due to excessive fear. Yet one cannot help wonder why these particular admissions were made when at least one of them (death of Egypt's firstborn) goes against the grain of the biblical narrative.

In the first case, there is no biblical warrant at all since it was the angel of death which did the killing. The Israelites were specifically *not* involved in the death of the Egyptian firstborn but were in their homes celebrating the first *Pesach*. The biblical verse cited with reference to the despoliation, *And let every woman borrow from her neighbor* can be just as easily read *And let every woman ask from her neighbor* (see Introduction).²⁶ But in this context, since these persons just admitted that they took the Egyptian money and ran, the interpretation seems to be 'borrow' since one cannot steal that which is given free and clear. This admission "we killed the Egyptian firstborn and stole their money" is interesting in that it yokes together that which is a possible biblical meaning (our ancestors left Egypt with borrowed items) to what cannot be accepted on the biblical level (our ancestors killed the Egyptian firstborn). In both cases, what is admitted here is done under duress caused by pagans (the approach of the Egyptian army). The historical implication is, "due to pagan pressures, we Jews can at times in anger and self-pity be pressured into admitting our guilt falsely. We should, in fact, cry out to God, for he longs to hear our voice." As such, this passage does not embrace the moral problem or justify it, but points out that, due to the pressure put on the Jews by their anti-Jewish counterparts, they could be forced to apologize for things for which neither they nor their ancestors were responsible. As such, it is not exactly a defense, but is associated with the other systems of interpretation which directly defended the actions of their ancestors. The text essentially claims that there is no apology necessary for the despoliation, any more than they needed to apologize for the killing of the Egyptian firstborn sons.

²⁶ It is translated 'ask' in the Soncino edition (S. Lehrmann, *Midrash Rabbah* [London: 1939, repr. 1961], 3:265).

Conclusions

It is rather obvious from the start that the midrashim from categories I or III above do not appear to have been suitable for use outside the walls of the *beth midrash*. However, even in the case of the midrashim which do seek to minimize the moral problem, the degree to which these midrashic endeavors seem, by and large, to be addressed to the community of faith, and not to the anti-Semitic/Gnostic challengers is noteworthy. In the Christian traditions of Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4:30) and Tertullian, the focus is clearly outward, as it is with Philo and Josephus. There may be evidence that the 'fair wages' theory above had play outside the *beth midrash*, as Tertullian seems to know of it. But, as we have seen, even here one suspects that that tradition came into being with the spiritual needs of the rabbinic disciples in view since a skeptical listener would have asked, "How is it that slaves can expect wages in the first place?" Tertullian had to strengthen the argument by making the case that the Israelites had been unjustly enslaved. We have also noted the same in Philo (see above). Josephus speaks of the plundering of the Egyptians in terms of *bon voyage* gifts and, as we have seen, he rewrote the whole story from the start so there was absolutely no deception involved—that is, no plea for time off to offer sacrifice in the wilderness. The Josephan Moses pleads for complete manumission from the start. Re-written in those terms, *bon voyage* gifts make sense.

But in the rabbinic literature, there is no such complete rewritten version of the story that could be used as a full explanation and justification of events. Perhaps they were aware that their opponents knew the Hebrew scriptures too well to be fooled so easily. Josephus' argument, as well as many other pre-rabbinic interpretations, depends upon the ignorance of the reader. The fact that the preponderance of the arguments put forth by the Rabbis are directed toward the *beth midrash* leads one to suspect that the moral challenges related to the biblical texts had a real disconcerting effect on the typical rabbinical student. Meeting these challenges was their main concern. These charges were ones that compelled the rabbinic masters to put their creative genius into high gear so as to arrive at spiritually satisfying solutions. Their concern was not so much to win converts or respond to their detractors as to answer the questions that would arise in *beth midrash*. To be even more cautious, it must be pointed out that these passages never make any specific reference to the Gnostics. It may well be that rabbis are answering in house concerns about general anti-Jewish attitudes with

these interpretations. This may also account for the fact that there has not been developed any cohesive answer to the moral problems raised by the biblical text.

However, by providing clusters of interpretive possibilities, it is perhaps expected by the rabbinic community that those who are in direct contact with Jewish detractors would choose and weave together several options into a new whole. We have seen exactly this sort of maneuver in Philo *Moses* 1:140–142 (fair wage and despoliation of defeated enemy). One could argue the following. God fulfilled his promise to Abram—that he would bring him out of Egypt with great possessions—by using the foolishness and hardheartedness of Pharaoh who set up both himself and his people for judgment. Through their own greed, the Egyptians took what had originally belonged to Joseph for themselves, and unjustly enslaved and oppressed the Hebrew people. God orchestrated events by giving the children of Israel great favor in the eyes of the Egyptians so that the Egyptians gave their treasures willingly and in superabundance. This constituted a fair and decent wage for all the Israelites' years of unjust enslavement. While it did involve trickery, it eventuated in justifiable vengeance and the return of goods to their original owners.

PART THREE

PATRISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

IRENÆUS

This study will seek to examine those references to the despoliation in patristic literature which appear to be unique (that is, they offer a fresh interpretive expression to traditionally received understandings which we have reviewed) roughly through the period of St. Augustine. Other passages will be considered in an excursus. The history of interpretation of this passage in patristic literature as a justification for the accommodationist posture in the Christ/culture debate is well-known, yet it is *not* the only biblical justification of Christian reading of non-Christian literature. For Jerome and many others, the preferred biblical image is that of the beautiful woman taken captive (Deut. 21:10–13).¹ Even so, we will focus our concern on passages which specifically make reference to the despoliation of Egypt mentioned in Exodus. The texts will be examined in chronological order following the dates suggested by Georges Folliet.²

IRENÆUS AND THE DIVINE ECONOMY *AGAINST HERESIES* 4:30³

Little is known of the Bishop of Lyon's life (c. 130–c. 203). He was likely born in Smyrna of Asia Minor where as a young man he knew the aged Polycarp. Around 170 he moved to Gaul with other emigrants of Asia Minor, where they settled in and around Lyon. He became a presbyter to the Greek-speaking community there and represented

¹ For a discussion of this motif, see H. de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (trans. M. Sebanc, Edinburgh: Clark and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:211–224.

² “La spoliatio Egyptiorum (Exode 3:21–23; 11:2–3; 12:35–36): les interprétations de cette image chez les Pères et autres écrivains ecclésiastiques,” *Traditio* 57 (2002): 1–48.

³ Folliet suggests 202–3 C.E. for this work (*Spoliatio*, 5). The designation 4.30.1–4 is based on the text of A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier in Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies*, [Sources chrétiennes, (SC 100) Paris: Cerf, 1965], 2:770–86. The American Edition of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* ([eds. Alexander Roberts and J. Donaldson, Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885, repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994] 1:503–4) and R. Grant (*Irenaeus of Lyon* [London: Routledge, 1997] 158–60) also list it as Book 4 chapter 30. W. Harvey in *Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis: Libros quinque adversus Haereses* (Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1857), has this chapter as 56 (2:248–51).

them to the bishop of Rome in 177. Upon his return, he learned that he had been appointed to the episcopacy in Lyon, a position he served with distinction. As bishop, he does seem to have lived up to his irenic handle when he requested toleration for the Montanists of Asia Minor from the Pope Eleutherius at Rome and later, when he appealed to Pope Victor on behalf of the Quartodecimans of Asia Minor.⁴

In this his principle theological treatise, he takes a less than irenic, tone bringing charges against the Gnostics—especially the system of Valentinus—at a period in which they posed a serious threat to the Church. He clearly believed that the teachings of Valentinus and other Gnostics threatened the central theological pillars of Christianity and so could not be brooked in the same way as one could tolerate the Montanists or Quartodecimans. “For Irenaeus this was no mere academic debate: his fight with the Valentinians was over the soul of authentic Christianity as he understood it.”⁵ Irenaeus succeeded in outlining the pseudo-Christian character of the gnosis and started a process which eventually eliminated the adherents from the Church.⁶

His opposition, unlike that of Clement of Alexandria, does not seek to establish a Christian Gnosis but emphasizes the ecclesiastical foundations of the episcopacy, Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) and theological tradition. Irenaeus’ hermeneutical method followed Hebraic understandings in contrast to both the overly hellenized philosophers like Clement and Origen and the bigotry and bombast of Tertullian.⁷ Parts of *Against the Heresies* (its complete title is *Denunciation and Refutation of the So-called Gnosis*) are preserved in Greek but the complete text is extant only in a literal Latin translation. Irenaeus begins *Heresies* with a description of what Gnostics believe (Book One), and a critique of the lack of internal cohesion in their teachings (Book Two), throughout which he shows an acquaintance with secular learning and the teachings

⁴ “Irenaeus, St.” in *ODCC*, 847. For an excellent overview of what is known of Irenaeus’ life, see Robert Grant, *Irenaeus*, 1–10. The account of Irenaeus’ appeal for tolerance in the Quartodeciman controversy is found in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24.9–18. Victor of Rome wanted to excommunicate many Christians because they were not celebrating the Lord’s crucifixion on Friday and Easter on Sunday but on whatever days of the week the 14th and 16th of Nisan happened to fall. See Mark J. Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God* (Lewiston, N.Y., Mellen, 1992), 5.

⁵ Olson, *Irenaeus*, 6.

⁶ J. Quasten, *Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature* (Utrecht: SPECTRUM, 1950, repub., Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc. 1983), 294.

⁷ E. Osborn, “Irenaeus: Rocks in the Road,” *Expository Times* 114.8 (2003): 255.

of the Hellenistic schools of the second century.⁸ Yet it is not his philosophical arguments which he deemed most decisive, but his treatment of scripture in which he offers a critique the Gnostic interpretations in withering detail (Books 3–5).⁹ In general, Irenaeus interprets the Hebrew Scriptures by means of ‘prophecies’ and ‘types.’ His purpose throughout is to critique the Gnostic rejection of the Old Testament on moral grounds (that is, Irenaeus argues for the morality of the Old Testament and the God it proclaims) or to rebut the Gnostic adulteration of the Old Testament text by means of allegorical interpretation.¹⁰ Irenaeus seeks to establish—often by means of typological exegesis—the congruence between all the events of the Old Testament and redemption in Christ. His work is fundamentally a theodicy in that it seeks to establish the goodness of the God of the Old Testament in order to identify that God with the God of Jesus Christ.

In our passage, Irenaeus “counters a Marcionite and gnostic interpretation of Israel’s leaving Egypt with the spoils of the Egyptians... the Marcionites used the event to substantiate their thesis of contradiction between the Creator and the good God, Christ’s Father.”¹¹ The Gnostics accuse the Demiurgic Creator of plotting and bringing about fraud and injustice against the Egyptians. They also draw a contrast between the Old Testament’s God who demands the despoliation of Egypt and Christ’s command that they not even take a staff on their journeys (Luke 9:3/Matt 10:10).¹²

AGAINST HERESIES 4.30.1–4

Because of the extended nature of our passage, critical portions will be translated (indented) and other portions summarized.¹³ Important phrases of original Greek and Latin translation will be provided when helpful. Commentary on the whole passage will follow, focusing on the manner in which Irenaeus made use of the biblical text and shaped it

⁸ G. Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 12–13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰ J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 1:162.

¹¹ D.J. Bingham, *Irenaeus’ Use of Matthew’s Gospel in Adversus Haereses* (Lovanii: Peeters, 1998), 221.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For a fuller, yet abbreviated, recent English translation, see R. Grant’s *Irenaeus*, 158–160.

for his argument against the Gnostics. Finally, I will examine what is unique and traditional in his exegesis in light of his understanding of the divine economy and his overall theodicy.

4.30.1 As for those who criticize and accuse (Οἱ δὲ ἐνδιαβάλλοντες καὶ ἐγκαλοῦντες) the people at the Exodus for taking, by God's order (κατὰ τὴν κέλευσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ), the vessels of every sort as well as clothing (σκεύη παντοδαπὰ καὶ ἱμάτια λαβὼν) from the Egyptians, out of which the tabernacle in the desert was made, (ἐξ ὧν καὶ ἡ σκηνὴ κατεσκευάσθη ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ) they prove themselves ignorant of the judgments of God and his "economies," (τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὰς οἰκονομίας οὗτου), as the presbyter used to say. For if God had not consented to this, in the prefigurative Exodus, (Εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἐν τῇ τυπικῇ ἐξόδῳ τοῦτο συνεγίνωσκεν ὁ Θεός), today in our exodus, (σήμερον ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἡμῶν ἐξόδῳ) that is, in the faith in which we are set, through which we have come out of the number of the gentiles, no one could be saved (οὐδεὶς ἡδύνατο σωθῆναι). For all of us are accompanied by possessions either modest or great, which we acquired from "the mammon of iniquity" (Luke 16:9).¹⁴

Irenaeus develops this line of thought: all the goods needed to live life, even for those who are in the faith, are acquired through greed in some fashion. Beatrice summarizes the argument, "According to the presbyter, the theft by the Hebrews is the prefiguration of the right Christian use of material goods."¹⁵ Everything we have, even as Christians, has been received from those who have obtained it illicitly.¹⁶

The Egyptian people owed not only their property but life itself to the earlier goodness of the patriarch Joseph, but what do the pagans owe us, when we receive profits and benefits from them? Whatever they produce by their labor we in the faith use without labor.

¹⁴ I follow the abbreviated translation of Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyon*, 158–9 where it is available. Otherwise, translations are my own based on the text of Rousseau, Hemmerdinger, Doutreleau, and Mercier in Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies*, [Sources chrétiennes, (SC 100) Paris: Cerf, 1965], 2:770–86. P. Beatrice has identified the anonymous 'presbyter' as Polycarp of Smyrna and suggests that those who criticize are Marcionites ("The Treasures of the Egyptians," 165). He notes that this presbyter is the first Christian exegete to consider the goods of the Egyptians as a wage due for the slave labor of the Hebrews (p. 167).

¹⁵ "The Treasures of the Egyptians," 167.

¹⁶ I did not include here a line which indicates that Christians are in the royal palace and are the beneficiaries of Caesar's property. This has caused certain scholars to the judgment that there was a group of Christians at Commodus' court and living there with favor. For a different opinion, see G. Clark, "Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 4.30.1" *HTR* 59 (1966): 95–97.

4.30.2 Irenaeus continues his argument by highlighting the abject desperation of the people (he avoids using any specific terms for Israel throughout, only calling them ‘populus’ or the like) while in Egypt (quoting Exod 1:13–14) in comparison to the great wealth which they produced by their services for their Egyptian overlords. Not only were the Egyptians ungrateful, but they considered the complete annihilation of the people to which they were deeply indebted.

What then was done unjustly (τί δὴ ἄδικον) if out of much they took a little (ὀλίγα ἔλαβον), and those who could have possessed much wealth (μέλλοντες πολλὰς οὐσίας σχεῖν ἰδίας) and gone away rich (πλούσιοι ἀπελθεῖν), had they not been slaves, left with the lightest pay for their long slavery (ἐλάχιστον μισθὸν ἀντὶ τῆς μεγάλης δουλείας λαβόντες)?

Irenaeus continues his argument based on an appeal to common decency. He points out that a person who had been enslaved by force (εἴ τις ἐλεύθερος συναρπασθεὶς ὑπὸ τινος βίᾳ), when they amassed great wealth for their new master, would be due at least some small portion of the wealth enjoyed by their master at their expense once they were freed. He rhetorically asks how a person unjustly enslaved who departed with only a little as a result of their labors could be accused of injustice when they had produced vast riches for their masters. This person, rather, will appear as an unjust judge against the one who has been violently enslaved (αὐτὸς ἄδικος κριτὴς φανήσεται τῷ μετὰ βίας καταδουλωθέντι).

Irenaeus turns the argument directly on the Gnostics by comparing them to the Egyptian taskmasters of old. They blame those who had only received a tiny portion of what was justly theirs yet they have no complaint against the taskmasters who were so niggardly in rendering payment for services provided, and even reduced them to the cruelest form of slavery, yet made tremendous profits off their services.

They accuse them of having received for their labors uncoined gold and silver in a few vessels (ἄσημον χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον ἐν ὀλίγοις σκεύεσιν), as we said, but—we will tell the truth, even should it seem ridiculous to some—they themselves, out of the labors of others, carry in their girdles coins of gold and silver and bronze with the superscription and image of Caesar (cf. Matt. 22:20–21) and say they are acting justly.

4.30.3 Irenaeus continues his argument by contrasting the little which the Hebrews took from the Egyptians who were greatly indebted to them to the much which the Church takes from the Romans to whom they (Christians) are indebted.

But if we compare ourselves with them, who will appear to have received more justly? The people, from the Egyptians who owed them all sorts of debts (ὁ λαὸς παρὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ὄντων κατὰ πάντα ὀφειλετῶν)? Or us, from the Romans and the other nations which owe us nothing of this kind? The world enjoys peace through them, so that we may walk without fear on the roads and sail wherever we wish.¹⁷

Irenaeus goes on to describe the manner in which Christians are indebted to the Romans: for peace, highways, general security and the ability to travel freely. He then applies Jesus' words to the Gnostics: they are trying to take a speck out of another's eye with a log in their own eyes (Matt 7:5). Irenaeus continues with the theme we have seen above which equates the *spoliatio* with the normal forms of commerce and business practice. He charges that if the person who brings complaint against the Jews of old were completely pure from any involvement in the daily commerce of the world (naked, barefoot and dwelling in the mountains), then their judgment might have validity. But if he enjoys all kinds of things which are ostensibly the property of other persons (εἰ δὲ πάντων τῶν λεγομένων ἀλλοτρίων μετέχει), yet he inveighs against what is typical of these things (καὶ κατατρέχει τοῦ τύπου αὐτῶν), then he puts himself on display as the most unjust sort (ἑαυτὸν ἀδικώτατον ἐπιδείκνυσιν), since he has turned the invective upon himself (ἀναστρέψας πρὸς ἑαυτὸν τὴν καταδρομήν). The accusation applies to the person bringing the charge, for he also carries about property which is not properly his own.

Irenaeus quotes Jesus' proscription against judging others (Matt 7:1–2) and interprets this to mean "we ought not unjustly condemn the divine economy" (ἀλλ' ἵνα τὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ οἰκονομίας μὴ κρίνωμεν ἀδίκως), "since he (God) made of everything a foreshadowing of righteous things to come" (ἐκείνου δικαίως τὰ πάντα προτυπώσαντος). God's plan is that all things work for justice. God's administration includes the transfer of wealth from those who will not use it well to those who will make good use of it. This flows from God's prescience that Christians will make better use of these goods which they have received from others. Here, Irenaeus makes interesting use of a series of gospel citations (Luke 3:2, Matt 25:35–36 and Matt 6:3) which each deal in some way with a transfer of wealth (coat, food and drink, alms).

¹⁷ As noted above, we have been following the translation of R. Grant (*Irenaeus of Lyon*, 158–160) to this point. Grant abbreviated his translation and does not include the following. From here the translation is my own.

In God's economy, wealth is to be transferred into the hands of those who redeem it by its better usage. Christians, similarly to those in the biblical story, receive good things from the hands of others which are then used for the construction of the tabernacle. This proves their own righteousness since "God dwells with those who act rightly" (τοῖς γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῖς συνοικεῖ ὁ Θεός). Irenaeus then quotes Luke 16:9 with the words "they may receive you into their eternal dwellings." These 'eternal dwellings' are interpreted as the dwelling of God with his people; that is, the Church. The final principle sums his argument up well, and will be provided in the original Greek and in Latin and English translation.

"Ὅσα γὰρ ἔθνη ὄντες ἀπ' ἀδικίας ἐπορισάμεθα, ταῦτα πεπιστευκότες εἰς τὰς κυριακὰς τάσσοντες χρήσεις δικαιούμεθα. 30.4 ἀναγκαίως οὖν ἐπὶ τῷ τύπῳ ταῦτα προεμελετᾶτο καὶ ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκ τούτων κατεσκευάζετο, ἐκείνων μὲν δικαίως λαβόντων, καθὼς ἐπεδείξαμεν, ἡμῶν δὲ προδειχθέντων ἐν αὐτοῖς τῶν δι' ἄλλοτρίων ἐξυπηρετεῖν μελλόντων τῷ Θεῷ.

[Q]uacumque enim cum essemus ethnici de injustitia acquisivimus, haec, cum crediderimus, in dominicas utilitates convertentes justificamur. 30,4 Necessarie igitur haec in typo praemeditabantur, et tabernaculum Dei ex his fabricabatur, illis quidem juste accipientibus, quemadmodum ostendimus, nobis autem praeostensis in ipsis, qui inciperemus per aliena Deo deservire.

For whatever we procured from impropriety while we were non-Christians, when we have become believers, we are justified when we prescribe these things to the Lord's use. 30.4 It is only logical, then, that those earlier things functioned as a type. From them the tabernacle was constructed and those who received them did so justly as I have shown. And in those same things we are foreshadowed, we who have begun to heartily assist God by using the things that belong to others.

Commentary

Paragraph One

We see with Irenaeus an admission that the despoliation took place at God's command (κατὰ τὴν κέλευσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ). It may simply be the case that, with increasing knowledge of the biblical text on the part of the Gnostics—in comparison to the typical anti-Jewish writers of the pre-rabbinic period—there was simply no sense in glossing over this biblical fact. Yet Moses' role in the events is not highlighted, nor is it emphasized that the children of Israel actually were commanded

by God to borrow these things without returning them. Irenaeus also doesn't mention the grace given by God to the Israelites which brought about the Egyptian willingness to loan their treasures so foolishly. He also does not include the biblical language which makes the whole passage problematic: "and so they plundered Egypt." It is interesting to note that Irenaeus describes that taken from Egypt first as "an assortment of things along with some clothing" (σκεύη παντοδαπὰ καὶ ἱμάτια λαβών) rather than the biblical 'vessels of gold and silver and clothing.' Clearly the point here is to downplay the value of what was taken—just an assortment of odds-and-ends along with some clothing; that is, a 'measly wages at last' argument. While he does mention the gold and silver treasure taken from Egypt, his emphasis throughout is to downplay its value. With Philo, he claims that what was lost in their freedom received the most paltry of payments in plunder.

All of these textual manipulations play a role in the way Irenaeus wages his argument. The primary case he makes is that the Gnostics are hypocritical in bringing charges against God's people for the plundering of Egypt because they do the very same things. Since all human commerce by which even Christians (including the Gnostics!) attain the necessities of life is driven by greed and self-interest, Gnostics are unrighteous in their charge that the Hebrews were in the wrong for the fact that they received the goods of Egypt. Even if a person lives off the largess of others, what they have received is not untouched by the filth of lucre. This being the case, there is no substantive difference between what the Israelites did and what both Gnostics and Orthodox Christians do; that is, both make use of tainted resources.

Since many Gnostics were Egyptians, Irenaeus' line about the indebtedness of the Egyptians to Israel's Joseph, besides having a parallel in b. Pesachim 119a, was particularly apropos. It implied the question: How can you complain about this biblical event when your ancestors were dependant upon the Jews for their very lives? But the primary point Irenaeus makes is that there is no substantive difference between the despoliation of Egypt and everyday commerce; all are based on greed and yet bring about the means by which we sustain our lives.¹⁸

¹⁸ Irenaeus reflects here the rather ubiquitous snobbery toward those who engage in commerce among the elite. Traders were viewed with suspicion and marginalized as 'not belonging' even by Homer (*Od.* 8.14ff.). Livy claimed that any form of profit-seeking was thought unsuitable for senators (*Liv.* 21.63.4). The author of Ecclesiasticus opines, "A merchant shall hardly keep himself from doing wrong, a huckster shall not be freed from sin" (26:29). St. Ambrose similarly condemns the immoral greed of merchants

Because the despoliation is interpreted here as normal but questionable commerce, the biblical language of plunder, since it smacks of warfare, rather than trade, was left unmentioned.

This being the case, the statement that by finding fault with the despoliation of Egypt, the Gnostics expose themselves as ignorant concerning τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ Θεοῦ is telling. On one hand, Irenaeus' argument is based on the contention that the plundering of Egypt was no worse than the common greed that drives all commerce. The despoliation is construed as that which proved God's just and providential acts. We see in the next line what Irenaeus meant: "For if God had not consented this in the typological exodus, today no one could be saved (οὐδεὶς ἠδύνατο σωθῆναι) in our real exodus." The key words are οὐδεὶς ἠδύνατο σωθῆναι. In this context, these words must mean more than the obvious, "no one would be able to be saved." For Irenaeus is here arguing that each believer brings into their Christian lives possessions tainted by the filth of trade and by these daily needs are met. This worldly mammon provides for the bodily welfare of those in the Church. Since the survival of the Church provides for the salvation (through the proclamation of the gospel) of others in later generations, no one would be able to be saved if the physical needs of the Christians are not met. This is the just and divine economy that the Gnostics cannot understand, a theme he will unveil further below.

But how does this tie into the protasis here, "For if God had not consented this in the typological exodus..."? Irenaeus seems to see

and insists that the sea should be used for the purposes of food, not for commerce (*De Elia*, 70). However, Roman aristocracy did benefit from the profit of trade when handled through intermediaries ("Trade, Roman" in the 3rd edition of *OCD*). Worthy of quotation at this point is Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.151 (Loeb Translation).

Trade, if it is on a small scale, is to be considered vulgar; but if wholesale and on a large scale, importing large quantities from all parts of the world and distributing to many without misrepresentation, it is not to be greatly disparaged. Nay, it even seems to deserve the highest respect, if those who are engaged in it, satiated, or rather, I should say, satisfied with the fortunes they have made, make their way from the port to a country estate, as they have often made it from the sea into port. But of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a freeman. But since I have discussed this quite fully in my *Cato Major*, you will find there the material that applies to this point.

J. D'Arms notes that statements such as those of Livy and Cicero may give the wrong impression. While small-scale trade was seen as 'petty trading' (*sordidas merces*), large-scale commerce was seen as worthy of respect when the gains were used to benefit ones broader agricultural holdings (*Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome*, [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981], 23–24).

this text, with all its moral dubiousness, because it has occurred at the command of God, as a justification for all the moral duplicities that are involved in the everyday commerce by which all, either directly or indirectly, have daily needs met. Here he allegorizes the text in an absolutely unique manner. Because it was okay for Israel to plunder Egypt, Christians are justified to partake in the questionable nature of everyday commerce, and so to have their physical needs met and thus bring about the salvation of those around them. The ethical principle is one that affirms the transformation of bad money into good purposes (providing the opportunity for salvation for all). These judgments of God are just because they provide for the everyday needs of the saints just as the vessels of Egypt (in the type) provided for the construction of the tabernacle.

Paragraph Two

Key to Irenaeus' 'measly wages at last' argument is the point that, not only was the enslaved nation responsible for the fabulous riches of Egypt, and not only were they terribly treated and even under contemplation for annihilation, the people of Israel (although they go unnamed throughout) had originally been free and had been abducted into slavery. This feature of the story is mentioned on at least two occasions in section two: ἐλεύθερος συναρπασθεὶς ὑπὸ τινος βίᾳ and later τῷ μετὰ βίας καταδουλωθέντι. The injustice of the violence of this enslavement is reinforced by the repetition of the word βίᾳ. Irenaeus is here appealing to the reader's general sense of decency. He makes his case on this combination of factors: Israel was unjustly enslaved, viciously treated, used to amass great wealth which would have been theirs if they had not been enslaved. Upon their release, only a tiny portion of what they should have received was taken—hardly a great crime.

Throughout it is assumed that these items were indeed taken and not given as gifts. Also, central to his argument is the notion that what was taken from Egypt was relatively insignificant. He even argues that those who make accusations concerning the despoliation put themselves on the level as the cruel Egyptian taskmasters. Beatrice finds echoes and even a dependence here of Philo's exegesis which emphasized "the immeasurable distance between the forfeiture of material goods and the deprivation of freedom."¹⁹

¹⁹ "The Treasures of the Egyptians," 167.

He later describes the plundered treasures as non-engraved gold and silver in the shape of a few vessels (ἄσημον χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον ἐν ὀλίγοις σκεύεσιν). The gold and silver (no clothing) is non-stamped in contrast to the stamped coins which the Gnostics receive from the labors of others (perhaps through offerings) with Caesar's inscription and likeness. Thus the gold and silver Israel received is not tainted with the impurities of human commerce (on which, as we have seen, Irenaeus takes a very negative view). The Gnostics take money stamped with the image and inscription of Caesar from the labors of others and thus, for all their judgments against the biblical narrative, are guilty of the worse crime. The word *few* minimizes the quantity of that taken from Egypt. He seeks to justify the events by arguing that the freed slaves only received a tiny portion of the great wealth they had amassed for Egypt.

Paragraph 3

As noted above, Bingham points out that the essence of the charge of the heretics was a judgment against God's economical arrangement as unjust.²⁰ Irenaeus bases his apology on two assumptions. First, all commerce and business carried out in the Roman empire is morally commensurate to despoliation (see footnote 30 above). Second, the Church (including the Gnostics), because it operates on the basis of offerings given by those who fully participate in the Roman systems of commerce, could be considered more guilty than the Hebrews of old since the Hebrews only took a small portion of the wealth of those who were, in fact, deeply indebted to them. The orthodox realize that this is based on the just economy of God that transforms bad money to good purposes. The Gnostics are implicated in that, while they participate in taking offerings, they criticize the Jews of old for participating in the plundering of Egypt. This is the basis of their hypocrisy.

In terms of the interpretation of the Exodus text, the primary addition involves the usage of the things taken from Egypt for the construction of the tabernacle. Irenaeus sees this as a typological foreshadowing of the manner in which the Church will receive offerings that also have the taint of moral corruption since they come from the profits of a world imbued with graft and fraud. As stated, in the divine economy, the things taken from those who do not know God and transformed into

²⁰ *Irenaeus' Use*, 222.

usefulness for divine worship prove the righteousness of the worshipper and the justice of God.

Conclusion

We conclude by asking what is unique to Irenaeus' exegesis and what is common to other exegetical traditions and how the uniqueness and similarities play into the divine economy and theodicy. As to the Irenaeian uniqueness, we have not yet encountered an expositor who allegorizes the text in relation to the divine economy which transforms bad money to good purposes. According to Irenaeus and his presbyter, the theft of the Hebrews prefigures the right of the church to make use of material goods for spiritual ends. In order to prove the hypocrisy of the Gnostics, he plays up the contrast between the indebtedness of the Egyptians to the Israelites (because of Joseph's salvation of the land and because of their years of unpaid labor) and the indebtedness of the Church (Christian and Gnostic) to the Roman world. He also compares the moral duplicity of the despoliation to that which is common in all trade. That which was despoiled did not amount to very much in the end; it consisted of gold and silver taken out in the shape of a few vessels.

We have noted previously the other exegetical traditions which exaggerated the amount taken from Egypt (Philo, in *Moses* 1:141, *EstR* 7:13). In Ezekiel the Tragedian (Eusebius in *Praep. Ev.* 9:28), in what is line 163–4 in *OTP* (see above), we encounter a similar apologetic strategy to limiting the amount taken. Only here is this set into the context of the divine economy by which the just are provided for by the taking of unrighteous mammon for transformation into divine worship. It is surprising that Irenaeus so limits the amount taken from Egypt because it begs the question: If the Israelites took so little from Egypt, how did they have enough for the construction of the tabernacle? But by highlighting this contrast, he throws the Gnostic complaint into a most negative light—they take much money from those to whom they are indebted yet Israel only took a little from those who were indebted to them for a vast amount of money and for their very lives.

Common to rabbinic tradition is the appeal to Joseph as the ultimate source of Egyptian wealth (b. *Pesachim* 119a). Yet these traditions are used here uniquely with heavy weight placed upon them. The use of plunder for tabernacle construction, in the divine economy, provides the final court of appeal that proves the righteousness not only of the

Jews but of the Church. So while Irenaeus may have drawn upon a fairly common stock of traditions, he builds upon them uniquely so as to prove not only the Gnostics unjust in their charges but the Church just in its involvement in the world.

His inclusion of the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–13) is particularly brilliant and it plays a central role in his argument. The Gnostics, for the most part, accepted the authority of much of the New Testament and here we have Jesus paying his respects to a steward for what appears to be embezzlement. Because these tabernacles are said to be eternal, these tabernacles are interpreted as the presence of God in the Church enabling the Church to bring about the salvation of the world. The Church is the new typical tabernacle, the eternal dwelling of Luke 16:9. Because the Church survives on the plunder (commerce) of the Romans, it is this unrighteous mammon that brings about universal salvation. “His appeal to God’s justice rests in his view of God’s foreknowledge concerning the Christians’ proper use of the resources they receive from others.”²¹ Irenaeus supports his case concerning the divine economy perfectly with Jesus’ words; money can be taken from the unrighteous righteously by the just when it is transformed into divine usefulness. As he says, without the continuance of the Church as a tabernacle of divine presence in the world, no one would be able to be saved.

God, as the wise architect and sovereign monarch, has so structured the world so that its economical structures are designed to bring good of evil and so that all persons are able, even through these unrighteous circumstances, to progress toward their intended end, the worship and adoration of their creator and redeemer. This is an instance which particularizes Irenaeus’ claim noted above, that God has structured the created order so that man might come to full stature and length of days (*Haer.* 5.5.1). All creation aids in salvation; its tribulations (here ‘despoliations’) are the divine hands kneading bread fit for the banquet of the king (*Haer.* 5.28.4).

²¹ Bingham, *Irenaeus’ Use*, 222.

TERTULLIAN

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (ca. 155—230) lived and worked in Roman Carthage during the reigns of Septimus Severus (193–211) and Caracalla (211–217). His father, a pagan, was a centurion of the pro-consular cohort. Tertullian converted to Christianity in 193 after he had gained a reputation for himself in Rome as a legal expert and advocate. Upon his conversion, he settled in Carthage where he dedicated all his forensic knowledge and aptitude to the defense and advancement of the Christian faith.¹ Even with his rejection of Catholicism, Tertullian's influence in the Church is surpassed by few others. His influence also resulted from his training in rhetoric; his writing employs virtually every rhetorical device imaginable in the style of the Second Sophistic.² In fact, Tertullian's skill in classical rhetoric shaped the 'habits of the mind' so deeply that it provided much more than a "stimulus to stylistic ornamentation. Rather, the canons of invention and disposition affected the structure of his argument and the movement of his thought" and may have even influenced the content of his thinking to some degree.³ Tertullian was not only deeply influenced by rhetoric, he had also drunk deeply from the wells of pagan logic and philosophy.⁴

While Tertullian is often understood as being deeply ambivalent about the Christian appropriation of pagan culture, recent research has called this opinion into question. In spite of his famous "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" and Tertullian's explicit rejection of Stoic, Platonic or dialectical Christianity (*Praescr.* 7.9–11), he had also reconciled, in his own way, Christianity and non-Christian culture by bringing his education and erudition to bear in the apology for and propagation of his faith. Barnes notes that the closing words of *The Pallium* "resolve

¹ Quasten, *Patrology*: 2:247.

² "Tertullian" in *ODCC*, 1592.

³ R. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 126–27.

⁴ T. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 187–232. However, see Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:247–49 for a differing opinion; Tertullian writes not merely as a sophist. He can only be understood as an ardent Christian who speaks from his heart and who was ready to die for his faith. His style was all his own.

any conflict between the two cultures: the humble pallium of the pagan philosopher is ennobled, once is it donned by a Christian.”⁵

Tertullian’s treatment of the despoliation is found in four places in *Against Marcion*. In only one of these instances is Tertullian’s treatment of the issue extended, and since this is the first instance, the following shorter treatments, to a certain degree, assume the first. For this reason, the lion’s share of energy extended here will examine the longer text, *Marc.* 2.20.1–3. This text does not indicate the exact manner in which the Marcionites were framing their defamation of the plundering of Egypt. The other three texts, while shorter, give a clearer picture of exactly what Tertullian is arguing against; that is, of exactly how Marcion was framing his position, and some nuances of Tertullian’s reply. Before we wade into a detailed examination of the longer text, we will survey briefly the three shorter texts to frame the Marcion/Tertullian debate with greater specificity.

The first of the shorter texts is eight chapters after the our longer text (*Marc.* 2.28.1–2). In book two, Tertullian argues that the Creator—or ‘demiurge’ in Marcion’s description—was the same deity as the true and good God. He begins chapter 28 by claiming that the Gnostic deity had to have been every bit as guilty of participation in human evil as the Creator God since if one could claim that the Creator allowed sin to persist, one can just as easily make this claim about any higher deity. To the Gnostics, Tertullian admitted that “Our God recommended theft (*Mandavit fraudem deus noster*)—but of gold and silver (*sed auri et argenti*). But by how much a man is of greater value than gold and silver, by so much is your god more of a thief, stealing man away from his Owner and Maker.”⁶ The Gnostic charge, as one would expect, and as opposed to what we saw in the pre-rabbinic texts, is specifically directed against the deity of the Old Testament and not just the Jews. The Gnostic deity is completely disassociated from these events and above reproach.

Tertullian responds with a fairly unimpressive remark that the gnostic God was guilty of greater fraud for he robs men of their Lord and Maker. But here we do have textual evidence that the Gnostic charge was in fact directed at the Creator God himself. Since Gnostics characterized the Creator’s actions as ‘fraud,’ we can assume that Marcion

⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 210; Tertullian, *Pall.* 6:4.

⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* (trans. E. Evans, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 165. All quotations of Tertullian from this point follow the Evans translation.

had commented on those very biblical features we have noted above in the Introduction. Moses was commanded by God to lie to Pharaoh about his real intentions of escape so that the Egyptians, expecting their return, loaned their treasures more willingly. Only this feature of the exodus story explains the characterization of it as divine fraud; God himself is at fault having ordered deception (Exod 3:18) and robbery by borrowing with no intention of recompense (Exod 3.21–22).

Marcion, contrasting the God of law (the Jewish God) from the God of grace (the God of Jesus), contended that only St. Paul and Luke were not blinded by their Jewish background and thus only they were authoritative.⁷ In book 4, Tertullian argues that the Jesus of Luke's Gospel is the Christ of the *Creator* God. In our next text (*Marc.* 4.24.1–5), Tertullian argues that the same God can act differently under different circumstances, and that Marcion wrongly interprets a diversity of causes as a difference of powers. The Jews *did* come out of Egypt laden with spoils, and Christ *did* command his disciples to go forth without even a staff for their journey (Luke 10:4 and Matthew 10:10). But we have here a difference not of powers (different deities) but of circumstances. The disciples would be able to be provided for since their journey was through cities, but the people of the Exodus were preparing to journey through a desert from which there could be no provisions. We need not assume that we are dealing with a different deity but only differing circumstances; thus, the God of Luke's Jesus is the God of the Exodus. The plundering here was intended to provide for the journey through the desert.

We see the plundered gold, silver and clothing understood as the supplies for the trip. Tertullian adds 'dough' to the list of items plundered—a reference to the dough of the Passover—to transform plunder into provisions for their wilderness journey. This perspective of the despoliation as necessary provision bears some similarity to "the viaticum (ἐφόδια)" by which the pilgrim provides for his return to his native land (Philo, *Heir* 273–4).

Later in the same chapter, Tertullian avers the God of Jesus is also a Judge (thus a God of Law) with the citation of Jesus' words, "The worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7).

⁷ "Marcion" *ODCC*, 1034. Marcion accepted only 10 of the Pauline epistles (he doesn't seem to know the Pastorals) and an edited recension of Luke.

And as Christ also declares that labourers are worthy of their hire, he sets in a good light that injunction of the Creator about taking away the Egyptians' vessels of gold and silver. For those who had built for the Egyptians houses and cities were certainly labourers worthy of their hire, and the instruction given them was not for robbery but for recovering the equivalent of their wages, which they could not exact in any other way from those who were lords over them (*Marc.* 4.24).

Since the Gnostics looked to the ten epistles of Paul as evidence that the God of grace was a different and higher deity than the God of law, Tertullian argues in Book 5 on the basis of Romans that God is both a God of law and grace, justice and mercy. In our passage, 5.13.6, Tertullian notes that Paul's invective against those who teach others not to steal yet steal themselves (Rom 2:21) is not intended as a censure against the Creator for having commanded fraud to be carried out against the Egyptians while he (the Creator) forbids men to steal (Exod 20:15). If the apostle had wanted to traduce the Creator in this way—especially if he was seeking to draw men away from the worship of the demiurgic deity—he could easily have made this clear and would not have refrained from doing so because of fear.

Hence his attack upon transgressors of the law, who teach men not to steal yet themselves steal, as a loyal servant of the God of the law, not as attainting the Creator himself under these heads, as one who while forbidding to steal gave command for deception against the Egyptians in the matter of gold and silver—for after this fashion they hurl back other complaints against him (*Marc.* 5.13.6).

It is apparent that the Gnostics had latched onto Paul's words of Rom 2:21 as a basis of developing their charge against the God of the despoliation: How could the Creator of the Old Testament inspire Paul to bring such condemnation on those who say that stealing is wrong and yet steal themselves? The Old Testament God does just this! R. Braun comments, "D'après le présent passage de T., l'hérétique utilisait aussi ce témoignage de Paul comme une critique indirecte et détournée de l'attitude du Créateur dans cet épisode de l'Exode."⁸

Let us summarize the Marcionite argument: the Creator God was guilty of fraud. The God of Jesus, as depicted in an abbreviated Luke and Paul, could not be implicated in this event and must be a completely different (and better) God since he enunciates a different and

⁸ *Contre Marcion: Livre V* (SC 483, Paris: Cerf, 2004), 263.

morally superior ethic. Jesus commanded his disciples to not ever take a staff with them on their journey (and thus to survive by faith), and Paul criticizes the hypocrisy of those who command others not to steal yet steal themselves. The God of the exodus does not live up to these standards and is thus an inferior and distinct deity from the God of Jesus and Paul.

Thus far, we have traced through the manner in which the Marcionites have been making their case against the Jewish God. But as we have stated, Tertullian does more than defend the Creator God in passing; in the following passage (2.20.1–3), he addresses the issue of the despoliation of Egypt in some detail.

¹ Now these cuttlefish—it was for a type of these people that the law excluded that sort of fish-meat, among others, from the (permitted) foods—as soon as they become aware of this exposure of themselves, proceed to belch out darkness mixed up with blasphemy, and thus distract the immediate attention of this man and that by the assertion and reiteration of statements which cast a cloud over the Creator’s goodness, though this is bright and clear.⁹ But I shall pursue their malice even through this blackness, dragging out into daylight those devices (*ingenia*) of darkness which cast up against the Creator, among much else, that damage, robbery of gold and silver, which he enjoined upon the Hebrews against the Egyptians (*fraudem illam et rapinam auri et argenti, mandatam ab illo Hebraeis in Aegyptios*).¹⁰

² Come now, unhappy heretic (*Age, infelicissime haeretice*), I challenge you in person to be arbitrator (*te ipsum expostulo arbitrum*): first take cognizance of the claims against the two nations, and then you may pass judgment against the Author of that command. The Egyptians demand of the

⁹ The cuttlefish is described by Pliny in *Nat. Hist.* 9:29 as a fish which effuses a dark inky substance whenever it senses that it is about to be captured. The dark cloud provides it cover so it may avoid its enemy. Lev. 11:10 and Deut. 14:9–10 forbid eating fish that lack fins and scales, proscriptions which exclude the cuttlefish. Braun writes, “La LXX se contente d’une designation générique sans faire mention expresse de la seiche (cuttlefish)” (*Tertullien, Contre Marcion Tome II* [SC 368, Paris, Cerf, 1991], 2:125).

¹⁰ *ingenia* Souter defines as a trick, craft or device as it is used in Tertullian (*A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1949]). Both Evans and Braun follow the text of the manuscript tradition even though it has been corrected by editors to *mandates* and *mandatam*. Braun writes, “En effet, le pluriel neuter *mandata* peut très bien s’expliquer comme apposition aux deux féminins *fraudem* et *rapinam* («choses qu’il a ordonnées...»); il a même l’avantage de conférer plus de relief au participe qui reviendra plus bas (§ 4, 1.37) sous la forme substantif (*mandatum Creatoris*) (Braun, *Contre Marcion* [SC 368], 2:200). The important element for our discussion here is the fact that Tertullian is admitting that it was God himself who commanded the *fraudem illam et rapinam auri et argenti* of Egypt.

Hebrews the return of their vessels of gold and silver: the Hebrews put forward a contrary plea, alleging, in the name of those same ancestors, and with that same scripture for documentary evidence, that wages ought to be paid to them for that slave-labor, the drawing of the brick-kilns (*pro laterinis deductis*) and the building of towns and country houses.¹¹

³ What award are you to make, you that have found for yourself a god supremely good (*Quid iudicabis, optimi dei elector*)? That the Hebrews ought to admit the damage done (*Hebraeos fraudem agnoscere debere*), or the Egyptians the compensation due (*an Aegyptios compensationem*)? For they report that the case was so stated by agents from the two sides (*Nam et aiunt ita actum per legatos utrinque*), the Egyptians claiming the return of their vessels, and the Jews demanding the wages of their work: yet that there the Egyptians with justice renounced their claim to the vessels.¹² Today, in spite of the Marcionites, the Hebrews put forward a further claim (*Hodie aduersus Marcionitas amplius adlegant Hebraei*). They say that however large the amount of that gold and silver, it is not adequate for compensation, if the labor of six hundred thousand men through all those years is priced at one penny a day (*singulis nummis*) each.

⁴ Again, which are the larger number, those who demand the return of their vessels, or those who dwell in the country-houses and cities? In that case which is the greater, the loss the Egyptians complain of, or the favor the Hebrews enjoyed? If the Hebrews were in return to bring against the Egyptians no more than an action for personal injuries, (they were) free men reduced to slavery. If their legal representatives were to display in court no more than their shoulders scarred with the abusive outrage of whippings, (any judge) would have agreed that the Hebrews must receive in recompense not just a few dishes and flagons (*non paucis lancibus et scyphis*)—for in any case the rich are always the fewer in number (*pauciorum utique diuitum ubique*)—but the whole of those rich men's property, along with the contributions of the populace besides. So then, if the Hebrews have a good case, the case, which means the commandment, of the Creator is equally good: he made the Egyptians favorable, though they were unaware of it (*et Aegyptios gratos fecit nescientes*), and at the time of the exodus he provisioned his own people with some slight indemnification, a payment of damages not described as such (*aliquo solatio tacitae compositionis*). And clearly he told them to exact too little (*Plane minus*

¹¹ Braun follows a differing manuscript tradition which reads *pro lateris deductis* which he translates, "pour la fabrication de briques..." (Ibid., 2:127 and 2:200).

¹² Evans follows the textual tradition *Et tamen has iustitia renuntiauerunt ibi Aegyptii* which Braun considers incomprehensible. Braun proposes *Et tunc uasa ista renuntiauerunt ibi Aegyptii; hodie aduersus Marcionitas amplius adlegant Hebraei* observing that the two textual corruptions which his emendation assumes can be explained without difficulty in light of their textual proximity (*Contre Marcion*, 2:201). He translates, "Et alors, les Égyptiens renoncèrent à leurs droits sur cette vaisselle; et aujourd'hui, les Hébreux, eux, contre les marcionites, prétendent à davantage (2:127).

exigi iussit): the Egyptians ought to have given back to the Hebrews their male children as well.

We will begin by surveying how he manipulates the biblical text—usually by means of addition—to justify the God of the Old Testament. We shall also explore resonances between Tertullian's additions and traditional interpretation possibly known to Tertullian. Finally we will examine what is uniquely Tertullian's contribution and exactly how he shapes the various strands of his argument into a cohesive whole.

Tertullian sets the whole discussion up as an imaginary legal courtroom; the Egyptians are challenged to bring their case against the Hebrews and their God (2—*te ipsum expostulo arbitrum*). If the Egyptians lose their case, he claims, the charges against the Creator God have no validity. This legal fiction is of course completely non-biblical but has resonance with extant rabbinic narrative haggadah. The degree to which Tertullian has drawn from rabbinic interpretive traditions has been long debated. The Jewish community of Carthage, according to rabbinic sources, is one of four great centers of study of the world.¹³ An expansive Jewish necropolis has been excavated with no less than one hundred tombs, a clear indication of a significant Jewish presence in the city.¹⁴

Barnes has argued that, in spite of appearances, Tertullian's references to the Jews belie a lack of any real contact with them. He notes that his *Adversus Iudaeos* was written to convert pagans, not Jews, by seeking to show that Christianity was the true spiritual heir of Israel. His knowledge of Jewish customs and thought is superficial and could be inferred from the Bible. Judaism was, for Tertullian, fossilized and not to be taken seriously and there is no reason to believe that Carthaginian Jews had any influence on the thought of Tertullian.¹⁵

Horbury, more positively, provides two instances from *The Shows* 30.5–6 in which Tertullian draws upon current Jewish anti-Christian polemic. Also noteworthy is Tertullian's report that Jews call Christians *Nazareni* (*Marc.* 4.7.1). Horbury concludes that Carthaginian Jews did indeed quarrel with Christians and that Tertullian was aware of these

¹³ D. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 278.

¹⁴ Millar and Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 3.1:62–63.

¹⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 92; 275–6. Barnes continues in this opinion in his 1985 post-script where he describes Tertullian as having no personal contact or interest in the burgeoning Jewish community of Carthage (*Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985], 330).

arguments and knew they were continuing to his own time. “Equally, since Jewry impinged on the Christian consciousness with these fundamental criticisms, the passages where contemporary Jews are mentioned should not be interpreted so as to suggest that Judaism was unimportant to Tertullian and his community.”¹⁶ Horbury notes that Tertullian does in one instance commend the Jews as exemplifying faithfulness to the traditions of their ancestors (*On Fasting, against the Psychics* 13.6) which Barnes strangely cites as evidence that, for Tertullian, Jewish faith was not worthy of serious attention.¹⁷

T. O'Malley is much more sanguine about Tertullian's positive borrowing of interpretive traditions from rabbinic sources, although in many cases, he may have taken them from Justin or Theophilus. He notes that Tertullian knows Jews greet each other with the word ‘peace’ (*in pacis nomine*—*Marc.* 5.5.1) and is impressed with the Jews for their *sapientia scripturarum* (*Marc.* 5.5.7). Especially in *Against Marcion*, we find Tertullian drawing on rabbinic midrash to provide answers to the standard difficulties raised by Marcion with “striking parallels with rabbinic exegesis of difficult scriptural *loci*. If Marcion used literal Jewish exegesis to show the anomalies within the Old Testament, Tertullian, with his predecessors, used the rabbinical solutions to some of those famous *crucies*.”¹⁸

The rabbinic parallel to our text occurs in both GenR 61:7 and b. Sanh 91a. GenR provides our sample text. Both texts place the debate about the plundering of the Egyptians in an imaginary legal context; Alexander of Macedon is the judge, the Egyptians are the plaintiffs, and the Jews are the defendants.

The Egyptians said, “We are making our claim against them on the basis of their own Torah. 600,000 men went up out of our land loaded up with vessels of silver and gold, as it is said, “and they plundered the Egyptians.” Let them give to us our silver and our gold.” Gebiah the son of Kosem said to him, “O King, 600,000 men worked for them 210 years, some of them were silversmiths and goldsmiths, who should receive as their wage a dinar per day.” The mathematicians sat down and figured it out and they had not come to 100 years before the land of Egypt was found to be in forfeit, and so they left in disgrace.

¹⁶ W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), 176–79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179 and Barnes, *Tertullian*, 92, n. 9.

¹⁸ *Tertullian and the Bible: Language—Imagery—Exegesis* (Utrecht: Nijmegen, 1967), 135–36.

David Runia believes this is the only passage in the whole of Tertullian in which there is undeniable evidence of knowledge of Rabbinic literature.¹⁹ For this one must assume that the traditions such as we have discussed above in GenR, a 4th century text, have precedents in earlier rabbinic literature. Several other studies also claim that Tertullian here clearly has been borrowing from the Rabbis. C. Aziza concludes his analysis of these textual traditions by explicitly rejecting Barnes' opinion that the contacts between Tertullian and the Rabbis of Carthage was superficial. "Tertullien non seulement connaît les arguments des rabbins mais encore il en use pour son propre usage."²⁰ He notes that, while Tertullian does not mention every detail found in the rabbinic texts—he surprisingly fails to mention that the Rabbis claim their case was heard by Alexander the Macedonian—the evidence proves beyond reasonable doubt that Tertullian had direct or indirect knowledge (by reading or by personal contact) with the rabbinic doctors of the laws and/or their texts. The least one can say is that the arguments he employs against the Marcionites are inspired by the Rabbis of Carthage.²¹ Braun refers to Aziza's conclusions approvingly with the claim, "De quelque façon que Tert. ait recueilli cette anecdote légendaire (lecture de texts rabbiniques? contacts avec le milieu juif de Carthage?), il est indéniable qu'il en est ici tributaire."²²

Several clear specific parallels are evident. As noted, both texts (Tertullian and GenR) recast the defense in the context of a court of law with Egyptians bringing charges against Jews. Several phrases are particularly relevant. First, Tertullian's claim *Nam et aiunt ita actum per legatos utrinque* (For they report that the case was so stated by agents from the two sides—paragraph 3 above) refers to this text tradition or one very much like it. Tertullian believes this case has already been tried and the verdict has legal precedent. His description of the case (Egyptians demanding the return of their treasures and the Jews demanding their unpaid wages), while slightly dissimilar—the Jews in GenR do not demand backwages—is similar enough to indicate dependence.

In contrast to the rabbinic traditions, the renunciation of the Egyptians to their claim is mentioned by Tertullian before the calculation of back wages. In GenR, the Egyptians back down only after the

¹⁹ Runia, *Philo*, 279.

²⁰ *Tertullien et le Judaïsme* (Paris: 1977), 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Contre Marcion* (SC 368), 2:226.

calculations have been completed; “So they left in disgrace.” Tertullian focuses on the Hebrew case and their upper-hand in the matter and, to emphasize the weakness of the Egyptian demand, he moves the Egyptian withdrawal forward. But the fact that Tertullian speaks of an Egyptian legal withdraw (*Et tamen vasis iustitia renuntiaverunt ibi Aegyptii*) is a remarkable point of similarity and an indication of some form of contact between these two textual traditions. The Hebrews, Tertullian says, were continuing to make their case (*Hodie aduersus Marcionitas amplius adlegant Hebraei*), and they were doing so as a rebuttal against the Marcionites. Tertullian displays here a clear awareness of the manner in which his Jewish contemporaries of Carthage were making their case against the Marcionites.

It is at this point (3) that Tertullian conveys what is most similar to the GenR text above: the value of gold and silver taken from Egypt was far less than a reasonable compensation for the labors of 600,000 men’s work over such a period of time, even at a penny a day. While the number 600,000 can be derived from the biblical number of Hebrew men involved in the exodus, the confluence of factors is the same in both text traditions. That is, both texts make the claim that, if 600,000 men were paid only a coin (*dinar/nummus*) a day for the whole period of enslavement, the total compensation would have been much greater than the value of whatever things may have been taken during the exodus. Both textual traditions (Rabbis and Tertullian) claim that if Egypt were to pay back what it actually owed, it would be in forfeit. The rabbinic version claims that this happened before those figuring reached 100 years. Tertullian’s version asserts “the whole of those rich men’s property, along with the contributions of the populace besides” would be required to pay back the Hebrews for their labors. While these are not exact parallels, the dissimilarity has an explanation. Tertullian’s version elsewhere, as we shall see, seeks to limit the harm done to commoners by emphasizing that the despoliation harmed and affected only the wealthy. To have this kind of similarity in texts which also place the debate in an imagined courtroom, allows one to reasonably conclude that Tertullian was indeed, as he claims, relating Jewish traditions at this point. The fact that Tertullian chose the general term *nummus* is also telling—one might expect a single *sesterce*. Tertullian perhaps did not know what a *dinar* was and therefore used the more general *nummus* (coin). Braun notes the similarity of the traditions in detail, and mentions one detail which has not yet been discussed here: the reference of

the two parties to the same *scripturae instrumentum* (the book of Exodus).²³ It again must be pointed out that GenR is still at least a century and a half away from composition, and that this argument relies on the possibility that this particular tradition came into being much earlier than the earliest extant version of it in rabbinic literature.

Some points of dissimilarity between Tertullian and GenR can be mentioned. Aziza notes (above) that Tertullian makes no mention of this case having been tried before Alexander the Great. I. Lévi, while agreeing that Tertullian indeed borrowed from the Rabbis in this text, notes that the legal fiction of Alexander adjudicating the case bears witness to the likelihood that the story originated among the Alexandrian Jews for whom Alexander's legal opinion would have been decisive.²⁴ Tertullian must have dropped this feature because he was altering the story from its fictive 'historical' setting before Alexander into a rhetorical courtroom scene unto which he challenged his opponents to come and judge for themselves. A second point of dissimilarity is that the rabbinic stories exactly name the number of years of unpaid labor which are calculated at a dinar per day (GenR has 210 years). Tertullian, perhaps aware of the varying biblical traditions here, speaks generally: "for all those years". Tertullian also seems to shift the 'fair wages' argument of the Rabbis toward a 'fair indemnification for personal injuries' argument; he mentioned the loss of freedom, lacerated backs and lost children.

In another expansion on the biblical story, Tertullian supposes that the treasures taken from Egypt consisted only of a few cups and plates from a few rich men (4—*non paucis lancibus et scyphis, pauciorum utique divitum ubique*). One cannot help but wonder if Tertullian here seeks to counter Marcion's claim that the despoliation caused hardships for Egypt's poorer folk. In any case, this supposition does limit the moral challenge of the despoliation, but it creates a biblical problem since it flies directly in the face of the repeated observation that the children of Israel borrowed gold and silver vessels directly from their neighbors (Exod 3:22; 11:2 and 12:36). One can hardly assume that the Hebrew slaves only had rich neighbors. In a similar vein, he claims that Israel could have demanded virtually everything owned by the wealthy

²³ Ibid., 2:226.

²⁴ "La dispute entre les égyptiens et les juifs devant Alexandre: écho des polémiques antijuives à Alexandrie" *REJ* 63 (1912): 214–215.

persons in Egypt along with the contributions of the general population (4). Toward the end of the paragraph, the ‘slight indemnification’ by which God’s people are provisioned is part of Tertullian’s argument; what God told them to exact was far less than what was actually owed to them (*Plane minus exigi iussit*).

We see a clear resonance here to the perspective taken by Ezekiel the Tragedian which was preserved first by Alexander Polyhistor and then by Eusebius (*Praep. Ev.* 9.28, 2–4; 29, 5–16). In the translation of Holladay, we read, “and a woman shall take from another woman, vessels and clothing of every kind, whatever a person can carry...in order to repay those mortals for what they did.”²⁵ Here the despoliation is limited only to what one person could manage to carry out on their own and only what a woman could receive from her neighbors. There is no indication in Ezekiel that only the rich were plundered, and no mention in Tertullian that only the women did the asking. We are probably not dealing with any form of direct borrowing. An indirect relationship between these texts is perhaps the most one could claim.

E. Meijering suggests that Tertullian is borrowing here from Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.30.2, since both argue “die Hebräer hätten einen kleinen Lohn mitgenommen. Diese allgemeine Bemerkung des Irenäus ist offenbar von Tertullian berechnet worden.”²⁶ In this passage, Irenaeus claims,

In what way was an injustice done if from the much (wealth the Egyptians had obtained through Israelite slave labor, the Israelites) took a few things. They would have been able to amass great wealth of their own had they not served (the Egyptians); indeed, they would have come out like rich men. But in fact, since they had received only a minuscule payment for their lengthy service, they went out impoverished.

Braun notes that the same argument has been made in Philo *Moses* 1.141–142, “tout ce qu’ils avaient souffert dans la servitude, ils le rendirent en vexations plus petites et nullement équivalentes.”²⁷ Braun notes that the combination of this parallel and another (fair wage argument) make it likely that Tertullian was indeed dependent on Philo.²⁸ According to Braun, Philo’s argument has two fundamental claims.

²⁵ *Fragments*, 380.

²⁶ E. Meijering, *Tertullian contra Marcion: Gotteslehre in der Polemik: Adversus Marcionem I–II* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 1:140.

²⁷ *Contre Marcion* (SC 368), 2:225.

²⁸ *Ibid.* It is Braun’s perspective which we follow below in our conclusion.

First, Israel did not plunder Egypt out of greed or covetousness but as a reasonable salary for services rendered. Second, in light of all the things the Hebrews suffered while in servitude, they rendered back sufferings that were lighter and in no manner of equal severity (ἐν ἐλάττωσι καὶ οὐχὶ τοῖς ἴσοις ἀντιλυποῦντες). Both of these arguments have been co-opted by Tertullian who creates from them “une habile gradation de la première à la seconde.”²⁹ Tertullian does not simply repeat the ‘fair wage’ argument, but transforms it into an argument based on the justification of compensation for personal injuries; scarred backs and lost male children are called up as evidence.

Braun notes further that Tertullian’s originality lies not only in the unique manner in which he weaves together rabbinic and Philonic traditions, but in the place he gives to rhetoric in framing his argument. This is especially pronounced in the manner in which Tertullian challenges his opponents to a forensic duel (*Age—iudicabis*).³⁰ It is this rhetorical challenge to which the Marcionites have been summoned that shapes much of Tertullian’s argument.

There are several features of Tertullian’s argument not yet mentioned which also bear similarities to previous exposition and dissimilarity from the biblical narrative. When he asks, “Were free men forced into captivity so that the Hebrews might retaliate against the Egyptians only with a judgment for their injuries . . . ?” he is contrasting the loss of freedom as by far a greater evil for which the items taken from Egypt do not fully compensate. Philo argued similarly in *Moses* 1:141: “For what resemblance is there between forfeiture of money and deprivation of liberty, for which men of sense are willing to sacrifice not only their substance but their life?” Philo emphasizes the high-born status of the Jews by nature and the fact that slavery was particularly odious to them because of their good breeding. We, of course, would not expect Tertullian to take up this line of thought. He only speaks in generalities. Such similarities are almost certainly indirect at best, and are likely explanations which were generally known. Another common

²⁹ Ibid., 225. Runia cites with approval the opinion of Waszink that there are no signs which unambiguously indicate that Tertullian had read Philo himself. A more probable explanation of similarities is that that “Greek exegetes of Holy Scripture acted as intermediaries.” J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De Anima* (Amsterdam, 1947), 14, cited by Runia, *Philo*, 280. Meijering believes Tertullian here is enlarging upon Philo’s *Moses* I, 141 without explaining why (*Tertullian, Contra Marcion*, 1:140).

³⁰ Ibid., 226. This rhetorical feature also becomes important in how we describe Tertullian’s case in the conclusion.

interpretive feature, mentioned above, is the notion that the treasures of Egypt were to provide for the Hebrews as they made their way through the desert; as in, “at the time of the exodus he provisioned his own people with some slight indemnification.” We noted Tertullian’s addition of the word ‘dough’ to that plundered from Egypt (4.24.1) and its similarity to Philo’s description of the despoliation as a viaticum (*Heir* 273–4). Here again, the treasures taken from Egypt are understood as some sort of provision for the wilderness wanderings.

The observation that the Egyptians had been made favorable unawares (*et Aegyptios gratos fecit nescientes*) as a part of a tacit arrangement (*tacitae compositionis*—or in Evans’ translation, “a payment of damages not described as such”) seeks to explain exactly how God went about giving his divine grace. It may have arisen from the biblical text itself and the question it seems to beg: How did God give this favor and what part did it play in the actual despoliation? The answer seems to be a substantive one: God made the Egyptians more grateful than they would be under normal circumstances. The Egyptians were completely unaware, yet it was this very gratitude which made them credulous enough to loan treasures to those who were obviously leaving for good. The arrangement was tacit in that God, Moses and the Jews knew about it, but the Egyptians were in the dark. God was just in doing this because the Egyptians would never have paid the Hebrew slaves for their labor and mistreatments willingly. The secretive nature of the operations reminds the reader of the inclusion of the word κρυφή in LXX Exod 11:2 (see discussion above) and to the texts discussed above concerning the virtue of the Jews in keeping a secret (LevR 32:5, NumR 20:22 and CantR.IV 12:1).

Another element in Tertullian’s argument may be a basic thesis of his *Prescription against Heretics*, which, as we noted, is something of an introduction to *Against Marcion*. There Tertullian had argued that the antagonists of the Church could be ruled out of bounds by the fact that they appeal to a scriptural tradition which was not theirs (ch. 15); heretics should not be allowed to argue on the basis of scripture because the scripture does not belong to them. This is the *praescriptio* that excludes any heretical argument: “he (the heretic) cannot employ the Bible for the simple reason that the Bible is not his...the Bible belongs only to those who have the rule of faith...”³¹ Thus, for Tertullian, the legal

³¹ Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:270.

case of the Marcionites (or Egyptians) is reduced by the simple fact that they are forced to base their appeal for reparations on a text which is not their own. The opposite is the case for the Jews who argue on the basis of their own ancestry and by their own text, which happens to be the same textual evidence to which the Marcionites have appealed (*ex eodem scripturae instrumento*). It is, however, surprising that Tertullian did not make this feature of his argument explicit.

There are also several features of his argument which are relatively unique. The sentence above, "Which then is the larger group, the group of those who claimed the vessels or those who are indwelling villas and cities?" seeks also to strengthen further the legal case he has borrowed from the Rabbis or from a Jewish tradition that precedes the Rabbis. The Hebrews had a greater grievance because they worked unpaid and benefited a much larger group of persons—the whole country of Egypt. Their compensation is lesser than the benefits their unpaid labors brought to a much greater population. We have not yet encountered another expositor whose defense is based on population sizes. It does fit into his larger interpretive goal; that is, to prove that the labors of the Jews were not fully compensated in relation to the benefits gained by the Egyptians, nor were their sufferings fully indemnified by their despoliations.

Also, he challenges his opponents, "You would have stated that the case was to be brought to satisfaction in favor of the Hebrews, not with a few plates and cups, no doubt of a few rich men from wherever." While we have seen other interpretations which limit the plunderings from Egypt, we have not seen the supposition that these treasures were taken only from a few rich persons. This addition, as we noted above, goes directly against the grain of the biblical text, but it does answer the question, "how could the God of the Jews have allowed even the poor people of Egypt to be defrauded?" God's punishment was limited to those responsible (Pharaoh and his henchmen—that is, the rich persons of Egypt).

We conclude by drawing together all the strands we have followed thus far. Tertullian drew on two main literary sources in making his case: Philo and the Rabbis (or a pre-Rabbinic tradition from Alexandrian Jewry). From Philo he drew the fair wage argument and exemplified it by utilizing the haggadah describing the trial before Alexander. His supposition is that if the Hebrews are found to be without guilt, then their God who commanded them is also beyond reproach. From Philo he also learned the rationale that the damage caused by the Hebrews

was far less severe than anything they had suffered. To this he added the claim that the benefits enjoyed by the Egyptians were far greater than any of the sufferings caused by Hebrew plundering. This addition shapes the story away from being a simple ‘fair wages’ argument toward being a ‘just indemnification for harm caused’ argument.

This argument of justified lesser damage becomes the central point of Tertullian’s presentation and it is here he drives his point home. He documents the terrible harms suffered by the Hebrews: loss of freedom, lacerated backs, loss of male children. Meanwhile, the wealthy only lost a few dishes and flagons while the whole population of Egypt benefited greatly from the Hebrew labors. The Hebrews deserved virtually all the wealth of Egypt and only took a little from a few. Since the case of the Hebrews is beyond reproach, their God is exonerated for commanding such an action, even if the Egyptians were left in the dark and didn’t realize why they (the wealthy Egyptians) were giving away their ‘dishes and flagons’ to the Hebrews. Only under these conditions could the Hebrews receive the light indemnification they received which amounted to only a few cups and flagons from a few rich men. The Marcionites are thus only muddying the water like cuttlefish with their unworthy accusations against the perfection of the Creator.

ORIGEN

While Origen was a theologian and spiritual writer *par excellence*, his influence as a biblical critic and exegete constitutes what is essentially the beginning of the golden era of scientific Christian biblical exegesis. We will introduce our exposition with a very brief survey of an important aspect of his work which may impact our discussion of Origen's exegesis. To what degree was Origen a biblical scholar/Christian and to what degree was he a philosopher? Second, what was Origen's attitude toward Jews and their contributions in biblical exegesis?

It has been claimed by many that Origen was, essentially, a biblical scholar whose mind was nourished primarily by the inspiration and authority of the scriptures.¹ M. Edwards has argued vigorously, and even persuasively, that Origen was not a Platonist, and that, in fact, Origen was something of an anti-Platonist who set out to develop a Christian philosophy which preserves theology from an infiltration of pagan thought. Edwards identifies five ideas which were, in Origen's day, considered to be characteristic of the thought of the Platonists. Each of these Origen either explicitly rejected or questioned. For instance, the Platonists understood objects in the present world to be fleeting and able to be defined primarily because they imitate eternal forms which dwell in a timeless realm. Yet in Origen's *First Principles* he charges the Ideas and Forms of Plato to be a chimera since only members of the Trinity can survive without a substrate to preserve form.² Origen's philosophy is autonomous even while in many ways influenced by Plato in the sense that he wrote about many questions which arise from his reading of Plato. "Origen's work contains the antibodies to Platonism as proof that he has suffered and resisted its attacks."³ Beatrice is of similar opinion in writing that the wisdom of this world, such as grammar, rhetoric,

¹ For instance, see H. de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (tr. Mark Sebanc, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 150ff. Henri Crouzel argues that Origen never lost sight of the importance of the literal meaning of the Bible, and in a sense, he was a strict literalist as much as he was an allegorist. It is Origen's typical practice to explain the literal meaning, even briefly, before going on to the spiritual meaning (*Origen*, [tr. A. Worrall, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989] 61. See also F. Cross, *The Early Fathers* (London: Duckworth, 1960), 134.

² *Origen Against Plato* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2002), 159–60.

³ *Ibid.*, 161.

philosophy, geometry, astronomy and music, is judged negatively by Origen and constitutes the wealth of sinners since it “teaches nothing about the will of God and is therefore inferior to faith, which allows the just man to abstain from sin.”⁴

David Runia notes that Origen looked to Philo, not so much as an important influence in shaping his fundamentally Platonizing world-view but in the area of biblical interpretation. He notes that Origen’s spiritual world-view differs from Platonism in that it is *Word-centered*. As with Philo, scripture is, for Origen, the medium of union with the Word, such that understanding it is not merely an academic exercise but a religious experience. Origen borrows from Philo the notion that the search for knowledge (a Platonic theme) is best focused on a quest to understand the scriptures. This quest brings about a union with Christ, the true source of knowledge. The incarnation is, for Origen, only a stage, and this indicates that the Platonic influence on his thought nullified for him the impact of the Christian doctrine of incarnation. His mysticism is ultimately centered not upon the incarnation of Christ but upon the eternal Word.⁵

While Origen is typically thought of as an allegorist for whom the literal was only an hermeneutical starting point, he systematically, especially in his interpretations on the Song of Songs, seeks to anchor his allegorical interpretation in the literal meaning of the text. This arises from his need to counter-balance the excessive allegorizing of the Gnostics. Good interpretation must tie the spiritual meaning of the text to its literal element (*Princ.* 4.2:9, 3:4). To what strikes many as his Platonist frame of mind, sensible reality reflects the intelligible realities and this reflection enables one to pass from the literal to the allegorical meaning. The literal does have importance educationally as a pointer to deeper truths. “With regard to the scripture as a whole, we are disposed to admit that all of it has a spiritual significance, but not all of it has a literal significance, since in several places it can be seen that a literal sense is impossible” (*Princ.* 4.3:5). We note below

⁴ “The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 171. Beatrice offers textual evidence for Origen’s negative opinion in *Hom. Exod.* 4.6 where the doctrines of the philosophers, the deceptive songs of poets and the art of dialectics are prefigured in various plagues of Egypt. Pagan philosophical doctrines are a kind of Corinthian food offered to idols and worse yet, are the women to whom Solomon yielded himself (*Hom. Num.* 20.3.2). In his treatise against Celsus, he clearly reveals his overall intention “at placing the encyclical disciples and pagan philosophy at the service of Christianity” (171).

⁵ Runia, *Philo*, 170.

Gregory 'Thaumaturgus' insistence that, while studying in Origen's school, students were requested to learn from all Greek educational treasures but not to follow any particular philosophical school. Edwards has convincingly shown that Origen himself followed his own advice, and that his indebtedness to Platonism was not as excessive as had been previously thought.

Next, we will dwell briefly on the question of Origen's openness toward Jewish biblical hermeneutics. N. de Lange in *Origen and the Jews* has set the stage for much of the recent discussion on the topic. De Lange sought to demonstrate Origen's knowledge of rabbinic traditions in his exegesis and the rather sweeping influence of these rabbinic traditions on Origen's exegesis. While admitting Origen's deep debt to Philo and Paul and other Hellenistic Jewish and Christian commentators, he claims that Origen's reliance upon the exegetical traditions learned directly from the Rabbis he knew in Caesarea is one of the distinctive features of his exegesis. Hardly any aspect of his exegesis has not been affected by these Rabbis and their exegeses.⁶

A. Kamesar draws attention to Origen's scientific interest in rabbinic exegesis, especially as a tool in the explanation of the literal sense of the text, as is indicated by his usage of it in the prologs to his commentaries.⁷ According to Greek and Latin procedure, the prolog of a commentary is where the scientific questions of title, authenticity, number of books, occasion and utility were addressed. Origen can be seen to employ the rabbinic sources as a part of scientific text-analysis involved in the categories of *exegetikon*. He employs rabbinic sources to search out the meanings of words (*glossematikon*). He, like others in the Alexandro-Palestinian tradition, draws upon some narrative haggadic traditions, especially when they had the support of proof-texts, as relevant historical data necessary to interpret the text (the *historikon*). Like Josephus, they treat the narrative haggadot as relevant historical material.⁸ From the Christian perspective, Jewish exegesis was literal. It is therefore natural that Origen and those who followed him would employ midrashic traditions explicating the literal meaning of the text

⁶ Page 134.

⁷ A. Kamesar, "The Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* (eds. J. Neusner and A. Avery Peck, Leiden: Brill, 2004), 29.

⁸ See Kamesar (*Ibid.*, pp. 32–33) for an explanation of the possibility that some haggadic sources could be understood as legitimate conjectural additions to the text (thus pertaining not to *historikon* but to *technikon*).

according to the procedures and practices of scientific literary analysis of *exegetikon*. “The Alexandrian and Palestinian Fathers sometimes viewed narrative aggadic traditions as historical data to be employed in the interpretation of the biblical text. This means that they viewed such aggadot as relevant to the ‘historical’ tool of *enarratio*, the *historikon*, the explanation of ‘matters of fact.’”⁹ We shall examine our text below to determine if it exemplifies this practice.

Origen was an extremely prolific writer but most of his works are no longer extant. Many others survive in fragments or in Latin translations, since his writings were extraordinary prolix and were later condemned. The text which treats the despoliation of Egypt is now chapter 13 of the *Philocalia* (‘Love of what is beautiful’), an anthology of his works, most of the MSS of which begin with a short preface stating that it was compiled by Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, and sent by the latter to Theodore, Bishop of Tyana.¹⁰ We will follow the English translation of Joseph Trigg for our study here, analyzed one paragraph at a time with critical phrases added in Greek.¹¹ Origen’s letter has traditionally been known as his *Epistula ad Gregorium*.¹²

When and to whom the learning that comes from philosophy is useful for the interpretation of Holy Scripture, according to Scriptural testimony.

Πότε καὶ τίσι τὰ ἀπὸ φιλοσοφίας μαθήματα χρήσιμα εἰς τὴν τῶν ἱερῶν γραφῶν διήγησιν, μετὰ γραφικῆς μαρτυρίας.

1. Greetings in God, my most estimable and venerable son Gregory, from Origen.

As you know, an innate capacity for understanding (Ἡ εἰς σύνεσιν... εὐφυΐα) can, with disciplined practice, achieve as far as possible what one may call its purpose, the thing for which the exercise is intended. Your natural ability can, therefore, make you an accomplished Roman lawyer

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ J. Robinson, *The Philocalia of Origen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), xiv.

¹¹ J. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998), 210–213. Trigg bases his translation on the critical edition of the text found in Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d’Origène à Grégoire* (ed. and tr. by H. Crouzel, SC 148, Paris: Cerf, 1969), 186–94. This is the Greek text followed here.

¹² We will refer to this by the English title below: *Letter to Gregory*. We also assume that the recipient of Origen’s advice was Gregory Thaumaturgus (Bishop Gregory of Neocaesarea). See H. Crouzel in “Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge?” in *Gregorianum* 60 no. 2, (1979) 287–319. P. Nautin has recently argued that the recipient of Origen’s letter was not the same Gregory as the Bishop of Neocaesarea (*Origène, sa vie et son oeuvre* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1977], 161).

or a Greek philosopher of one of the reputable schools. Nonetheless, I have desired that with all the power of your innate ability you would apply yourself, ultimately, to Christianity. I have, for this reason, prayed that you would accept effectively those things from the philosophy of the Greeks that can serve as a general education or introduction for Christianity (φιλοσοφίας Ἑλλήνων τὰ οἰονεῖ εἰς χριστιανισμὸν δυνάμενα γενέσθαι ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα ἢ προπαιδεύματα) and those things from geometry and astronomy that are useful for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures (χρήσιμα ἐσόμενα εἰς τὴν τῶν ἱερῶν γραφῶν διήγησιν). For just as the servants of philosophers say concerning geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric and [astronomy]¹³ that they are adjuncts to philosophy (ὥς συνερίθων φιλοσοφία), we say this very thing about philosophy itself with regard to Christianity (περὶ αὐτῆς φιλοσοφίας πρὸς χριστιανισμὸν).

By the Hellenistic period, the Greek *paideia* was widely regarded as the essential hallmark of all things Greek and educational institutions, namely the gymnasium, were seen as being a primary center for the distillation of Greek culture and identity.¹⁴ The disciplines of encyclical education—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music—are discussed in Plato’s *Republic* (7.533D) and reappear in post-classical times as the *quadrivium*. Taken together with the literary arts of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic (the *trivium*), they comprise the encyclica (*enkyklios paideia*) which had to be mastered at the secondary level before a student could be allowed to move on to the study of philosophy, literature or rhetoric. Philosophy, at least by those who espoused study of it, was considered the pinnacle of all education.

The introduction of the letter places the whole discussion under the heading of the usefulness of that which comes from philosophy in the interpretation of scripture. As M. Harl has written, “Origène conseille de prendre dans la culture profane *seulement* ce qui est utile pour l’interprétation des Écritures”.¹⁵ Harl claims also that the terms employed by Origen which provide an allegorical sense for the vessels taken from Egypt («culture générale», «propédeutique») come from Philo along with his enumeration of the liberal arts.¹⁶ Philo, as we have seen, draws from the biblical despoliation of Egypt tradition in making his case—which he limits to the appropriation of encyclical education

¹³ Trigg, for some reason, has ‘geometry’ repeated here. The SC text of Crouzel and PG have ‘astronomy.’

¹⁴ “Education, Greek” in *OCD* (3rd edition), 508.

¹⁵ M. Harl in Origène, *Philocalie*, 1–20 *sur les écritures* (SC 302, Paris: Cerf, 1983), 400. We will examine Philo’s influence below.

¹⁶ Harl, in Origène, *Philocalie*, 402.

by Jewish students (Gen 15:14). Philo can be seen as taking a position between two extremes; complete rejection and complete appropriation of Greek culture. Origen looks to Philo as an important predecessor and saw his own exegetical work as very much an extension of it particularly as a model for an allegorical interpretation which provides philosophically mature theology.¹⁷

B. Neuschäfer's work *Origenes als Philologe* has shown that Origen made use of the literary techniques of the pagan grammarians (part of the *encyclia*) more than might have been supposed. In doing so, he discusses Origen's *Letter to Gregory* in some detail, especially in order to illustrate the fact that Origen did not neglect the *historikon* (he translates as 'Sacherklärung'). He did not restrict himself or others to the Bible as a source of useful information but considered as of great importance comprehensive Hellenistic education (umfassende hellenische Bildung) for the interpretation of scripture.¹⁸ While he notes that Origen's interest in the encyclical here is mainly tangential, Origen does seem to treat it as a part of the greater whole of 'hellenische Bildung.' "It seems reasonable to define the origenic position on the Hellenistic paideia from his intrinsically relevant and more frequently articulated posture toward philosophy."¹⁹ What is central for Origen is that this intellectual subject matter (Wissensgegenstände) be viewed from a Christian perspective and that it be subordinated to Christian interests. According to Neuschäfer, we are dealing here with a double principle of choice and subordination.²⁰

The evidence from Gregory Thaumaturgus provides background. Gregory's letter of thanks to Origen informs us about the curriculum of the school at Caesarea: after preparatory training in dialectic, physics, geometry, astronomy (ch. 8) and ethics, the pupil moves on to theology. The texts of the ancient philosophers and poets were read (ch. 9) followed by the reading of Scripture.²¹ Interestingly, when Gregory describes his study of theology with Origen (chs. 13–14), his emphasis

¹⁷ Runia, *Philo*, 163.

¹⁸ B. Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1987), 1:156. It should be noted that P. Beatrice has seriously doubted Neuschäfer here, especially his claim that the depreciation of sciences and philosophy does not belong to the authentic thought of Origen but rather to Rufinus' interpretation ("Treasures of Egypt," 172).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Runia, *Philo*, 158.

is completely upon Origen's insistence that no particular philosophical school be followed.

He thought it right that we should philosophise, and collate with all our powers every one of the writings of the ancients, whether philosophers or poets, accepting and rejecting nothing (for we had not the necessary discrimination), save only those of the atheists, who have taken leave even of ordinary common sense in a body, and deny the existence of God or Providence... But he urged us to become acquainted and conversant with all the others, neither espousing nor rejecting any school or theory in philosophy, whether Greek or Barbarian, but to give a hearing to all.²²

Gregory concludes his description concerning the theological education under Origen with a description of Origen's emphasis on the primacy of scripture (ch. 15). "As regards this latter subject, he counseled us to pin our faith to no man, even though he were testified to by all men as most wise, only to God and His prophets."²³ The study of theology is essentially, for Origen, a study of the scriptures. However, from what Gregory has been saying to this point, and the manner in which Gregory describes the study of the scriptures, it is clear that what enamored Gregory's heart and placed him so completely under Origen's thrall was the philosophical allegorizing by which Origen brought the scriptures to light. His language concerning the nature of Origen's method of biblical interpretation is deeply allegorical. "He himself would interpret and make clear what was dark and enigmatical, such as are many utterances of the sacred voices... But he made them clear and brought them into the light, whether they were enigmas—for he was a wondrous hearer to God, and of most excellent understanding—or contained nothing naturally crooked or incomprehensible by him."²⁴ Gregory goes on to describe his time in Origen's school as a veritable Garden of Eden of biblical interpretation. This was indeed the study of theology and would constitute the last stage of Origen's educational model; namely, the study of God by means of prayerful (see below) allegorical biblical exposition. Philosophy may provide an introduction to theology in that it provides the questions to which Christian theology, which results from biblical allegory, provides philosophically mature answers. Neuschäfer's 'choice but subordination' description is particularly apt.

²² Translation of W. Metcalfe, *Gregory Thaumaturgus Address to Origen* (New York: SPCK, 1920), 75–6.

²³ Metcalfe, *Gregory*, 81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

In paragraph 2, Origen introduces his allegory of the plundering of Egypt.

2. And indeed Scripture hints at this principle in Exodus (αἰνίσσεται τὸ ἐν Ἐξόδῳ γεγραμμένον), where, with God himself the person speaking (ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ), the children of Israel are told to ask their neighbors and cohabitants for vessels of silver and gold and for clothing (Exod 11:2 and 12:35). Having in this way despoiled the Egyptians, they may find material among the things they have received (ἵνα σκυλεύσαντες τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους εὕρωσιν ὕλην πρὸς τὴν τῶν παραλαμβανομένων) for the preparation of divine worship (εἰς τὴν πρὸς θεὸν λατρείαν). For, from the spoil taken from the Egyptians (Ἐκ γὰρ ὧν ἐσκύλευσαν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους) the children of Israel prepared the appurtenances of the holy of holies (οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις τῶν ἁγίων κατασκεύασται), the ark with its covering, the cherubim, the mercy-seat, and the golden vessel in which was stored the manna, the bread of angels. These articles appear to have been made from the finest of the Egyptian's gold (ἀπὸ τοῦ καλλίστου τῶν Αἰγυπτίων εἰκὸς γεγονέναι χρυσοῦ). From gold of second quality (ἀπὸ δὲ δευτέρου τινὸς) they made wide solid gold candelabrum, close to the interior veil; and the golden table, on which was placed the bread of offering; and between them the golden incense altar. They used any gold of third or fourth quality, if available (Εἰ δέ τις ἦν τρίτος καὶ τέταρτος χρυσός), for the construction of the holy vessels (τὰ σκεύη τὰ ἅγια). The silver of the Egyptians became other things. For, while sojourning in Egypt, the children of Israel had an abundant quantity of such precious materials for the worship of God to show for their experience there (ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ γὰρ παροικούντες οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τοῦτο ἀπο τῆς ἐκεῖ παροικίας κεκερδήκασιν, τὸ εὐπορῆσαι τοσαύτης ὕλης τιμίας εἰς τὰ χρήσιμα τῇ λατρείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ).²⁵ From the clothing of the Egyptians it seems that they had such things as they needed for what Scripture describes as embroidered works. Assisted by God's wisdom (μετὰ σοφίας θεοῦ), tailors stitched the articles of clothing together to serve as veils and tapestries for the interior and exterior.

We will bring to bear the methodological questions we have been asking all along. First, how does Origen interpret this passage so as to make what was said fit into his present circumstances and interests? What is similar to previous exegesis? What is unique to Origen? We note first that Origen uses standard language of allegory when he has the scriptures hinting or intimating (αἰνίσσεται—a verb Origen uses three times in this

²⁵ The translation of Crouzel is "car les fils d'Israël exilés en Égypte, ont gagné de leur séjour là-bas d'avoir en abondance quantité de matériaux précieux pour fabriquer les objets utiles au culte divin" (Grégoire le Thaumaturge, 189).

letter) that which concerns the usefulness of philosophy.²⁶ To explicate the allegory of the despoliation of Egypt as he does, he draws upon haggadic traditions (as *historikon*) which associate the treasures taken from Egypt with the materials used in the construction of the wilderness tabernacle and which classify the gold used in tabernacle construction into differing qualities. The first haggadic addition which claims that plundered treasure was used for the worship of God (ὑλὴν...εἰς τὴν πρὸς θεὸν λατρείαν) and was that from which the children of Israel prepared τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις τῶν ἁγίων, plays a central role in Origen's allegory. Just as the Hebrews used the treasures plundered from Egypt *for the construction of the wilderness tabernacle*, so Christians may draw upon non-Christian philosophical texts *for the explication of biblical texts and construction of a Christian theology*.

What is particularly striking about Origen's argument is that while he clearly desires the allegory to provide biblical warrant for his exhortation to Gregory to study pagan topics and texts, yet the allegory is not explained (in this paragraph or in any following) in any kind of detail as an allegory. In other words, we might expect something as simple as, "For God permitted the treasures of Egypt to be taken by the Hebrews as an indication for us, that we might plunder the treasures of knowledge of the Greeks so long as we do so to glorify God..." But we have no such explanation. Origen spends his time describing the text and its haggadic additions. While he doesn't seek to defend the biblical story, he does seek to expand upon it by drawing on known haggadic additions. Yet his purpose in doing so is clearly to make the allegorical argument that would motivate Gregory in his studies. In other words, while his point is clearly allegorical, the weight of discussion in this paragraph is upon the biblical text itself and its haggadic additions.

There may be several reasons for this. First, this set of traditions and interpretations (despoliated treasures used to build the tabernacle = Greek wisdom put to Christian use) could have been broadly accepted and part of the exegetical tradition. It thus would require little explication or interpretive justification. We have already seen it in Philo. Second, the paucity of allegorical application tells us something of the importance of the biblical text itself for Origen; that is, once one has

²⁶ Trigg notes that this recalls the words of St. Paul in I Cor. 13:12 βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι (Trigg, *Origen*, 271). It is not clear how this recalls I Cor. 13 since Paul in this passage is saying nothing that relates to the despoliation of Egypt. Of course, all allegorical interpretation such as this one was justified with the claim that the words of scripture hint at a more profound meaning like an image in a mirror.

the text itself qua text fully comprehended (which here includes the haggadic traditions associated with the text itself), the correct allegorical interpretation is an organic byproduct.²⁷

Origen's defense, as Harl notes, claims "les Hébreux, à la différence des Égyptiens, ont su en faire un bon usage, grâce à la sagesse de Dieu, διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφίαν."²⁸ Harl here quotes the first lines of paragraph 3 that spell this out explicitly; the Hebrews transformed what the Egyptians were not using appropriately, through the wisdom of God, for divine service. The biblical connection made here between the 'wisdom of God' and the despoliation is evident from Origen's usage of a similar phrase at the end of paragraph 2—the tailors were able, by God's wisdom (μετὰ σοφίας θεοῦ), to transform the clothing taken from Egypt into veils and tapestries for the tabernacle's interior and exterior. This reflects LXX Exod 31:2–6 whereby Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the divine spirit of wisdom and understanding and knowledge (πνεῦμα θεῶν σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως καὶ ἐπιστήμης) for the construction of the tabernacle. Included in the divine skill provided by God is dexterity with woven garments (v. 10) that Origen interprets as the ability to turn clothing into tabernacle veils and tapestries for the tabernacle.

We have seen that Irenaeus (*Haer.* 4.30.1–4) makes a similar argument but with different goals. The Irenaeian claim that the despoliation is justified because by it God puts these treasures to better use seeks to justify God's economy against the Gnostic critics. Origen's interest is purely allegorical. He does not seek to defend God's honor against the Gnostics but to defend and encourage Christians to employ their pagan education and philosophy in the interpretation of scripture. By divine wisdom, the Christian interpreter is able to put the knowledge of the Greeks to better use much like Bezalel and Oholiab by divine wisdom transformed the garments of Egypt into the wilderness tabernacle. The importance of this interpretive feature becomes clear below.

Origen drew on this same passage (Exod 31:2–6) in his *Homily on Numbers* (XVIII, 3.2) to affirm his contention there that all knowledge does indeed come from God (Sir 1:1). In this context, Origen notes Sirach's proviso that knowledge about how to do wrong (*sapientia mali-*

²⁷ Whether this is actually the case, of course, will be debated. Here it is only necessary that Origen may have conceived the relationship between the literal and allegorical in such a manner. Crouzel certainly would have it this way (*Origen*, 61).

²⁸ Harl, Origène, *Philocalie*, 402.

tiae) does not come from God (19:22). He concludes, "It seems to me to mean that all practical knowledge considered necessary for human use in relation to some art (trade), or with respect to the knowledge of anything, is claimed to be wisdom given from God."²⁹ He goes on to quote Exod 31:1–6 to illustrate God-given knowledge useful to humanity as a trade. The second category of knowledge (the nebulous 'knowledge of anything') may relate to the higher levels of education such as philosophy. If it does, this also, potentially, may be said to have come from God. For Origen's allegory in his *Letter to Gregory* however, he clearly wants the reader to understand that, just as divine wisdom was given to Bezalel and Oholiab for the construction of the temple, so divine wisdom is necessary for anyone who seeks to transform Egypt's treasures/Greek learning into that which affords worship to God. The emphasis in our text is on the necessity of divine wisdom to properly utilize non-Christian learning rather than on practical knowledge coming from God.

How does Origen draw upon previous exegesis in his contention that the treasures taken from Egypt were used for the construction of the tabernacle? We will see that while Origen does indeed draw upon such haggadic traditions, we only have traces of this exegetical theme in extant pre-rabbinic and rabbinic literature. It is with Origen, and to some extent, as we saw, in Irenaeus, that this explanation of events is articulated in detail—at least in terms of the extant literature. In Jubilees 48:18 we encountered a hint of this interpretation when 'vessels of bronze' are mentioned as having been taken from Egypt. Scripture nowhere mentions bronze vessels taken from Egypt. This feature assumes that all the items necessary for the wilderness tabernacle were taken at the despoliation and bronze was used along with the gold and silver.³⁰ In *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shim'on b. Jochai* (Bo 12:35–6), we learn of the respectful friendship the Israelites enjoyed with their Egyptian neighbors. This respect was so great the Egyptians insisted that the Israelites take certain *bon voyage* gifts of immense value with them upon their exodus. The Israelites were at first reluctant to touch these treasures, but Egyptian insistence won out in the end. The treasures

²⁹ Illud mihi sensisse uidetur quia omnis peritia, quae uel erga artem aliquam usui humano necessaria habetur, uel cuiuslibet rei scientia sapientia dicatur a Domino data (Origène, *Homélies Sur Les Nombres II; Homélies XI–XIX* [SC 442, ed. Louis Doutreleau, Paris, Cerf, 1999], 320–322). My thanks to Russell Sisson for correcting my translation of the Latin.

³⁰ See Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 325, n. 13.

with which they escaped were so immense that one Hebrew escapee would have been able to pay for the expenses of the tabernacle and its furnishings with the gifts given to them by their Egyptian neighbors.³¹ This exaggeration seems to be an expansion on a putative tradition concerning the connection between the despoliation and tabernacle construction. It is also another indication of how commonly accepted the tradition had become—in spite of the fact that there is no explicit rabbinic evidence for it.

We see this interpretation *assumed* again in chapter 41 of *Aboth d' Rabbi Nathan*. The chapter opens with these words, “R. Simeon said: there are three crowns: the crown of the Torah, the crown of the Priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but the crown of a good name excels them all (Aboth 4.17). Paragraph 9 reads:

Three things returned to their original place: Israel, Egypt’s wealth, and the heavenly writing. Israel returned to their original place, as it is stated, *Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River* (Josh 24:2) and it is also stated, *And carried the people away into Babylon* (Ezra 5:12). Egypt’s wealth returned to its original place (to Egypt) as it is stated, *And they despoiled Egypt* (Exod 12:36) . . . and it is also stated, *And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord* (I Kings 14:25f.).³²

This midrash seems to claim that Shishak took away the *very vessels* previously taken from Egypt since the wilderness tabernacle, the temple’s precursor, was believed to have been furnished with the gold and silver taken from Egypt. The midrash must understand Shishak’s despoliation of Jerusalem’s temple to have consisted of the exact vessels originally taken from Egypt by the Israelites (or at least vessels made from the gold and silver of the original vessels) since the text designates it as an example of “things returned to their original place.” This being the case, the vessels plundered from Egypt, by the providence of God, have already been returned to Egypt by Shishak after his despoliation of the Jerusalem temple. Here we surely encounter the assumption that the plundered treasures of Egypt were put to use in the construction of the wilderness tabernacle.

We are dealing here with a tradition that was known in pre-Rabbinic and Rabbinic exegesis even though we only encounter a direct exposi-

³¹ Epstein and Melammed, *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shim'on*, 31.

³² Translation of E. Cashdan, in *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud*, 1:207.

tion of it in Origen (and to limited degree in Irenaeus' *Haer.* 4.30.1–4). Origen is clearly drawing on traditions that were commonly accepted; he needed little explanation or apology for using this non-biblical addition as the critical basis for his argument. As we have noted, the haggadah forms the basis for his allegory (as the Hebrews used the plundering of Egypt to build the temple, so we ought to plunder the knowledge of the Greeks). Origen is clearly dependent upon Jewish narrative haggadah here, and in fact, may be passing on other elements of the tradition that have been lost (*viz.* the varying qualities of gold taken). As A. Kamesar described above, Origen drew upon the narrative haggadot to explain the text on the literal level. In using these Jewish legends, he provides an important historical framework (*historikon*) which was understood as background information helpful to understand the text.

We have already briefly mentioned that Origen's exegesis also includes subdivisions of qualities of gold taken from Egypt. This, of course, has no biblical referent since the scripture speaks of the gold to be used for the ark, etc., in the same manner as the gold used for the menorah, etc. For instance, in LXX Exod 25:11, concerning the ark of testimony Moses is commanded Καὶ καταχρυσώσεις αὐτήν χρυσίῳ καθαρῷ and of the candlestick God says Καὶ ποιήσεις λυχνίαν ἐκ χρυσίου καθαρῷ (Exod 35:31). The language concerning varying qualities of gold taken from Egypt may reflect Jewish a narrative haggadah unknown to us.³³ Origen's allegorical point is clear enough; just as there are distinctions to be made between the qualities of precious metals plundered from Egypt and used in the construction of the tabernacle, so one must discriminate between varying philosophies and encyclical knowledge plundered from the non-Christian world. Differing fields of study and schools of philosophy have differing levels of helpfulness as one seeks to interpret sacred writ literally and allegorically. While we cannot name a rabbinic tradition parallel to this, Origen was probably not drawing from thin air here. He is likely drawing on a rabbinic tradition for its allegorical import in his argument. On the other end of the spectrum, manna understood as 'bread of angels' has many parallels.³⁴

Another textual tradition which may have influenced Origen's exegesis is Philo's *Heir* 270–74. There, the treasures taken from Egypt

³³ M. Harl says, "Origène semble dépendre ici de traditions juives qui ne se trouvent pas dans la Bible" (Origène, *Philocalie*, 402).

³⁴ Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 358–60.

are interpreted as provisions but in a completely different manner; the *ἀποσκευή* of LXX Gen 15:14 is the viaticum by which the soul makes its journey from the lower regions to its heavenly home. In the allegory, this refers to the same encyclical education as mentioned by Origen in our passage. In 274 we read,

Reared in all the lore of the schools (τοῖς τῆς ἐγκυκλίου μουσικῆς ἐντραφεῖς ἄπασιν), it acquires therefrom a longing for the higher contemplation (ἐξ ὧν θεωρίας λαβὼν ἕμερον), and wins the sturdy virtues of self-mastery and perseverance (ἐγκράτειαν καὶ καρτερίαν, ἐρρωμένας ἀρετάς, ἐκτήσατο); and thus when the pilgrim wins his return to his native land (μετανιστάμενος καὶ κάθοδον τὴν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα εὐρισκόμενος), he takes with him all these fruits of instruction (πάντ' ἐπάγεται τὰ παιδείας), which are here called 'stock.'³⁵

It is not obvious Origen had this passage before him. He does not operate from the same text and does not speak of the soul's journey upward under the discipline of encyclical education. Origen does speak of the encyclical only as a comparison; as the encyclical is to philosophy so philosophy is to theology. Yet both apply that taken from Egypt by plunder to Greek education (Origen adds philosophy) by means of allegory.

As to Origen's uniqueness, he is the first to apply the haggadic tradition that the gold taken from the temple was used for divine worship to the question of the usefulness of philosophy in terms of biblical interpretation and Christian theology. We can be relatively certain Origen was familiar with the Philo passage above, but he does not seem to be following that passage here specifically since he draws on a different text for different purposes. Perhaps Philo gave him the idea generally—the despoliation of Egypt allegorized as the usage of pagan learning generally. Origen applies it to both the encyclical and to philosophy, not just to the encyclical as does Philo.

Second, Origen is unique in the way he brings to bear the divine wisdom given to Bezalel and Oholiab in the interpretation. Origen contrasts the wisdom given by God for the transformation of Egyptian treasures into objects of true worship to the lack of wisdom by which the Egyptians had previously made use of their wealth. In the next paragraph, he notes that the Egyptians were not using these treasures

³⁵ Philo, *Heir* 274 (Colson, LCL).

appropriately. What could only have been wasted or used for the worship of idols was transformed for the worship of the true God. Divine wisdom is needed for the Christians as they put pagan knowledge to Christian use. Origen's great alarm about inappropriate accommodation of pagan learning (3) and his instruction for the place of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in pious biblical interpretation (4) shed light on the purpose behind Origen's allegory of Bezalel and Oholiab; they represent those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit so as to wisely transform pagan treasures into sacred worship. Origen drew upon the haggadic tradition that the treasures of Egypt were used for the construction of the tabernacle (as we have shown above), and upon Philo's allegory of the despoliated treasures which justified Jewish education in the *encychia*. He fused these two together into an allegory which encourages Christian education in philosophy as a plundering of Egypt by which the tabernacle of Christian theology is constructed by divine wisdom and patient prayer.

If Origen has been drawing upon an unknown narrative haggadic tradition of varying qualities of gold and silver taken from Egypt, he has done so uniquely and his purpose is to illustrate the need for the Christian to discriminate between varying levels of helpfulness of Greek learning for biblical interpretation. Perhaps we could even expand this to say that the gold and silver of lower quality (third and fourth levels) relate to the encyclical learning which is helpful only on the literal level. These precious metals are usable only in the outer temple courts of literal exegesis. The gold and silver of finer qualities (second and first) represent philosophical learning that inspires and relates to allegorical interpretation—the very adjuncts of theology. These qualities of gold and silver are usable in the very holy of holies of allegorical hermeneutic. Below (4) we will see that Origen truly does understand allegorical exegesis as a sort of participation in the godhead—a 'holy of holies' kind of experience. Because these various qualities of gold and silver function so well in his allegory, it is altogether possible, if not likely, that we are here dealing with not an unknown haggadic tradition added by Origen but an extra-biblical detail created by Origen himself to help fill out the allegory.

3. Why did I need to make this time-consuming digression, demonstrating that the things taken from the Egyptians were useful to the children of Israel (εἰς ὅσα χρήσιμά ἐστι τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ τὰ ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου παραλαμβανόμενα), things which the Egyptians themselves did not use appropriately (οὐκ εἰς δέον ἐχρῶντο), but the Hebrews, through the

wisdom of God, used for divine worship (Ἐβραῖοι δὲ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφίαν εἰς θεοσεβείαν ἐχρήσαντο;)?

Scripture recognizes (Οἶδεν μέντοι ἡ θεία γραφή), nonetheless, that there was a bad outcome for some who descended from the land of the children of Israel into Egypt, hinting (αἰνισσομένη) that there will be a bad outcome for some who dwell among the Egyptians (ὅτι τισὶ πρὸς κακοῦ γίνεται τὸ παροικῆσαι τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις), that is, among the learned disciplines of the world (τουτέστι τοῖς τοῦ κόσμου μαθήμασι), after being nurtured in God's law and Israelite worship of him (μετὰ τὸ ἐντραφῆναι τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τῇ Ἰσραηλιτικῇ εἰς αὐτὸν θεραπείᾳ). Thus Hadad the Idumaeon³⁶ did not fabricate idols in the land of Israel until, after fleeing the wise Solomon, he descended into Egypt³⁷ and became a part of Pharaoh's household by marrying his wife's sister, so that he brought forth and reared children among the children of Pharaoh. Therefore, when he went back up into the land of Israel (Διόπερ, εἰ καὶ ἐπανελήλυθεν εἰς τὴν γῆν Ἰσραήλ),³⁸ he did so in such a way as to tear asunder the people of God and have them say to the golden calf, "These are your gods, O Israel, which led you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:4 and 8; I Kings 12:28). I could speak from knowledge gained by experience that few are those who have taken anything useful from Egypt (ὁ τὰ χρήσιμα τῆς Αἰγύπτου λαβὼν) and have come out from there and have prepared objects for the worship of God (τὰ πρὸς τὴν λατρείαν τοῦ θεοῦ), but many have followed the example of Hadad, the Idumaeon (πολὺς δὲ ὁ τοῦ Ἰδουμαίου Ἄδερ ἀδελφός). These are those who have used some Greek ingenuity to beget heretical ideas (Οὗτοι δὲ εἰσιν οἱ ἀπὸ τινος Ἑλληνικῆς ἐντρεχειᾶς αἰρετικὰ γεννήσαντες νοήματα) and have, so to speak, prepared golden calves in Bethel, which means "house of God." It seems to me that through these things the Word of God hints (αἰνίσσασθαι) that

³⁶ Trigg, as do most commentators, notes that Origen has confused Hadad (Ader in Greek) of I Kings 11:14–25 with Jeroboam of I Kings 11:26–12:33. Some of the story relates to Hadad the Edomite (I Kings 11:19,20—the marriage of Hadad to Pharaoh's sister-in-law and the birth of their child). Trigg unfortunately, seems to have dropped a phrase from his translation: μὴ γεγόμενος τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἄρτων which Crouzel translates, "parce qu'il ne goûtait pas aux nourritures égyptiennes" (Grégoire, 191). Hadad's eventual eating Egyptian food indicates the depth of his involvement in Egyptian culture. Food laws were designed to provide a separation between the Jews and Gentiles, a separation which Hadad transgresses.

³⁷ Trigg again seems to have failed to translate a phrase: ὡς ἀποδράς ἀπο τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ σοφίας which Crouzel translates, "comme s'il avait fui loin de la sagesse de Dieu" (Ibid.). This is part of Origen's allegory; Hadad is escaping from Solomonic wisdom, given by God, and thus he flees from divine wisdom into the arms of idolatry.

³⁸ The use of the εἰ with the indicative mood is curious here. It may speak of an allegorical assumption related to what really happened and so fold the allegory into the story: "If Hadad (the Gnostic) has returned to the land of Israel (that is; returned from philosophy to Christianity), he did so in such a way as to tear asunder the people of God.

they have set up their own idol beside the Scriptures, where the Word of God dwells, so that they are symbolically referred to as Bethel (ἐν αἷς οἰκεῖ λόγος Θεοῦ, τροπικῶς Βαιθήλ καλουμέναις). The Word says that another idol was set up in Dan. Dan is in the frontier district, close to the regions of the gentiles, as is evident from the book of Joshua the son of Nun (Jos. 19:47). Thus certain idols are close to gentile districts (Ἐγγὺς οὖν εἰσιν ἔθνικῶν ὁρίων τινὰ τῶν ἀναπλασμάτων), the very ones which the brothers of Hadad constructed, as we have explained.

Several important comments can be made about the above paragraph. Firstly, Origen contrasts the successful usage of Egyptian treasures by the children of Israel in 2—of which, in the allegory, only few Christians are capable of doing—to the excessive and destructive Egyptian influence upon Hadad in 3. Hadad during his sojourn in Egypt, by tasting Egyptian bread and marrying an Egyptian women, put himself in an overly accommodative posture toward things Egyptian and became effectively egyptized. Because he imbibed Egyptian culture and ways of life so deeply, when he returned to Israel he brought his Egyptian ways and established Egyptian-style idolatry in Bethel. Idolatry also flourished in Dan because of its proximity to pagan territories.

There are five textual pointers from the literal to allegorical (underlined above): the double usage of αἰνίσσομαι, the word τουτέστι, the phrase Οὗτοι δέ εἰσιν, and the adverb τροπικῶς. Because the first two and the last two function together in the same allegory, we end up having three discrete allegories. The first two markers apply the bad outcome of Hadad's sojourn in Egypt to those who imbibe too deeply from the learned disciplines of the non-Christian world after having been trained in God's law and worship. In the second (Οὗτοι δέ εἰσιν οἱ), Origen spells out exactly what goes wrong by spending too much time in Egypt; that is, he allegorizes the next portion of the biblical story dealing with the golden calf built by Hadad (the biblical Jeroboam). The allegorical brothers of Hadad are those who use Greek ingenuity to birth heretical notions (οἱ ἀπό τινος Ἑλληνικῆς ἐντρεχείας αἰρετικὰ γεννήσαντες νοήματα). Harl describes the danger represented by Hadad's brothers thus.

Le danger...d'adopter les sciences profanes après avoir été élevé dans la loi et le culte de Dieu, et de ne pas savoir sortir de ces sciences pour rapporter ce qui doit être «utile...au culte de Dieu», χρήσιμα...πρὸς τὴν λατρείαν. L'interprétation de l'histoire d'Ader vise non seulement les Chrétiens qui risquent de forger leurs théories à l'aide des sciences

grecques mais, plus particulièrement, les Gnostiques, accusés traditionnellement d'avoir emprunté aux Grecs les éléments de leurs spéculations.³⁹

Hadad's introduction of idolatry into Israel is allegorized as the introduction of heretical ideas by Christians who imbibe the culture of Egypt too deeply. In our context, Origen argues that they marry into the Egyptian royal family, eat Egyptian food and end up worshipping Egyptian gods. The development of heretical ideas results from this overly-accommodating posture toward the world's learning.

The last two allegorical markers also function in tandem and associate the biblical city of Bethel to the Word of God.

It seems to me that through these things the Word of God hints (αὐνίσσασθαι) that they have set up their own idol beside the Scriptures, where the Word of God dwells, so that they are symbolically referred to as Bethel (τροπικῶς Βαιθὴλ καλουμέναις).

The literal Bethel, or 'House of God,' equals, in the allegory, the Word of God that for Origen is commensurate with the scriptures. To accept philosophy uncritically is, for Origen, to set up an idol in Bethel; that is, to put one's philosophy alongside (rather than in subordination to) the scriptures. Origen may rely here on some narrative haggadic tradition that associates Bethel with the divine revelation beyond the meaning of Bethel in Hebrew.⁴⁰ This association comes into play primarily in the haggadic interpretation of Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22). B. Hul 91b and B. Sanh 95b, by interpreting וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה in Gen 28:10 as "And he got to Haran" instead of "And he set off toward Haran," have Jacob wondering in Haran how he bypassed Moriah without praying. When he decided to return to Moriah for prayer, the earth contracted to bring Moriah up to Haran so that "he encountered 'The Place'" (וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם—Gen 28:11) as it came up to meet him.⁴¹ It was after he prayed that the sun set and he lodged in Moriah—not Bethel! GenR

³⁹ Harl, Origène, *Philocalie*, 403. Crouzel describes the lesson of Hadad as, "ce sont les Hérétiques qui, au lieu de se soumettre aux Livres divins qu'ils ont mission de scruter, transposent à l'intérieur du Christianisme le projet idolâtrique du philosophe, construisent des idoles par dessus la Parole de Dieu et adorent l'oeuvre de leur propre pensée. Pour trop de chrétiens, la philosophie est la mère des hérésies" (Grégoire le Thaumaturge, 90–91).

⁴⁰ There is no instance in which Philo makes such an association.

⁴¹ The association of the term 'hamaqom' with Mt. Moriah as the place of revelation is based on Gen. 22:4 and 14. The verb רָאָה was associated with the cult generally and with temple mount specifically as indicated by its association with the word 'Moriah.' In Gen 22:14 Moriah was translated ambiguously so as to signify both the

68:10 interprets the “Because the sun set” of Gen. 28:11 as “because the sun was extinguished” with the illustration of a king who extinguishes lamps because he wants to speak to his friend in privacy.⁴² The reluctance of these rabbinic interpreters to associate the name ‘Bethel’ with this place of revelation—going so far as to claim that this really occurred at the temple mount (*Moriah*)—clearly results from the biblical association of Bethel with the cult of Jeroboam. Yet Origen, if he was aware of such traditions, would easily have filled in the mental gap, and interpreted Bethel as the place of revelation; that is, a place where God spoke to his friend in privacy. It is no long jump from there to the association of Bethel to the Holy Scriptures—which are for Origen, the place of revelation and communion with God.

It is more likely, however, that he relies on biblical texts which associate God’s word with God’s dwelling; for instance, Psa 118:89 in Greek: Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, Κύριε, ὁ λόγος σου διαμένει ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. The idol set up at Bethel therefore symbolizes the importation of concepts and ideas by the Gnostics in the realm of biblical interpretation (the Word—the revelation—*Moriah*) to the degree that they think philosophically more than they do biblically. We remember Gregory’s observation above that Origen taught his students to refuse to espouse any particular philosophical school but to learn from all but those that denied providence. To espouse one school is to set up a golden calf at Bethel, the house of God.

4. You, then, my lord and son, apply yourself (πρόσεχε) to the reading of the divine Scriptures, but do apply yourself (πρόσεχε). We need great application when we are reading divine things (πολλῆς . . . προσοχῆς), so that we may not be precipitous (ἵνα μὴ προπετέστερον) in saying or understanding anything concerning them. Also, applying yourself (προσέχων) to divine reading with the intention to believe and to please God, knock at what is closed in it (τὰ κεκλεισμένα), and it will be opened to you (ἀνοιγήσεται σοι) by the doorkeeper, concerning whom Jesus said, “To him the doorkeeper opens” (Jn 10:3). As you apply yourself (προσέχων) to divine reading, seek correctly and with unshakable faith in God the sense of the divine Scriptures hidden from the many (τὸν κεκρυμμένον τοῖς πολλοῖς). Do not be content with knocking and seeking, for prayer

place “Yahweh will see” and where “Yahweh will be seen.” II Chron. 3:1 explicitly links Mt. Moriah with the temple mount.

⁴² One may consult L. Ginzberg’s *Legends of the Jews*, 1:152ff. for haggadic traditions of Jacob’s “Night of Marvels” by which his dream of angels is transformed into a divine revelation of world history.

is most necessary for understanding divine matters. It was to exhort us to this very thing that the Savior did not only say, “Knock, and it shall be opened to you” and “Seek, and you shall find,” but also, “Ask, and it shall be given to you” (Mt. 7:7, Lk. 11:9). I have dared to say these things out of my fatherly love for you. If my boldness was good or not, God alone would know, and his Christ, and he who participates in the Spirit of God and in the Spirit of Christ. May you be such a participant, and may you always grow in such participation, so that you may not only say, “We have become participants with Christ” (Heb. 3:14), but, “We have become participants with God.”

The disconnectedness between this paragraph and those previous has been noted by Harl.⁴³ Harl also points out that the lesson to be learned by the reader of this paragraph is that of a reserve with regard to Greek understanding and science. The utility of these sciences remains secondary while the deeper meanings of scripture is given by God directly as a result of prayer.⁴⁴ Prayer and divine illumination that comes as a result is the key to all good allegorical biblical interpretation; it is that which unlocks what is hidden away from the many. One ought not be impetuous (*propetes*) for this is the wrong way to approach the scriptures. The Gnostics approach the scriptures hastily, assuming that they already know what it teaches, based on their knowledge of philosophy before they have seriously read it.⁴⁵ It is this prayerful act of allegorical biblical interpretation that draws one into communion with spirit of God.

How does this fit into the broader flow of the letter? Paragraph 1 treats the possibility of Greek philosophical learning being a useful adjunct to theology. Paragraph 2 deals with the scriptural support for this text on a literal level which has import for his allegory. Paragraph 3 treats the dangers of wrong usage of philosophy—the Gnostic brothers of Hadad. Paragraph 4 claims that prayer for the guidance of the spirit is the most necessary component to successful allegorical interpretation of scriptures and the antidote to impetuous (Gnostic) biblical interpretation. He ends with the exhortation to prayer and pious propriety as the antidote for Gnostic impetuosity. Origen never returns to the positive uses of philosophy as an adjunct to theology and never works

⁴³ “La partie finale de la *lettre*, une *parénèse*, n’a aucun rapport avec ce qui précède” (Origène, *Philocalie*, 403).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Trigg, *Origen*, 271.

out in detail the allegory of the despoliation of Egypt the way he does for Hadad and Bethel. This is probably because, as he himself notes, there are many (Gnostics clearly are the brothers of Hadad) who abuse these intellectual resources and few who use them properly.

P. Martens sees Origen's repeated use of the verb *προσέχω* (to pay close attention to) and the noun *προσοχή* in this passage as indicative of the type of hermeneutical and prayerful attentiveness that made Origen's exegesis helpful to many, even if they could not brook his use of allegory. Basil of Caesarea, for instance, was in possession of this text in his *Philocalia*, and was critical of the allegorical method of interpretation as a whole. However, he was also a proponent of Origen's kind of spiritually attentive hermeneutic, and uses much the same language as Origen. "Basil's ideal of the attentive biblical exegete was clearly anticipated by, if not also influenced by Origen."⁴⁶ Reading scripture is, for Origen, a spiritual affair—the only correct (*ὀρθῶς*) way of reading. It is this disposition as one reads that pleases God since it exhibits faith in God. Calling on one of Origen's favorite passages in scripture (Matt 7:7), the attentive exegete asks, seeks and knocks in prayer for the correct interpretation that discerns the scriptures' true spiritual sense.⁴⁷ Again, it is this spiritual attentiveness to the text that prevents one from setting up their own idol in Bethel and keeps the exegete from joining Hadad in Egypt.

Another theological theme which comes to the fore in this paragraph is that of divine participation. Here again, Origen provides language for many of the theologians who followed him, even if they developed and perfected his idea.⁴⁸ We see here reflections of Origen's vision of the primary occupation of humanity (and of the whole of creation); to participate in the ongoing relative dynamism of the Trinity and thus to partake in the very life of God. It is only when biblical interpretation attains this level that one actually becomes a partaker of God by the Spirit. Origen presents the study of philosophy only as an intermediate pedagogical stage between the encyclica and theology. True Christianity

⁴⁶ "Interpreting Attentively: the Ascetic Character of Biblical Exegesis According to Origen and Basil of Caesarea" in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition* (ed. L. Perrone, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 1120–1121.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ D. Balas, "The Idea of Participation," *Premier colloque international des études origénienes* (eds. H. Crouzel, G. Lomiento, J. Ruis-Camps, Instituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antice: Università di Bari, 1975), 275.

flows from the prayerful participation with the Spirit of God. One must study the text while asking, seeking, and knocking, so that the Spirit opens the mind to truth and one becomes a partaker of the godhead. Perhaps, as suggested above, philosophy helped the students ask the right questions so that, through prayerful biblical interpretation resulting in participation in God himself, one's theological ruminations are philosophically mature and intellectually satisfying. It is only then, by the supernatural wisdom of the Spirit, that Egypt's treasures are transformed into tabernacles of divine worship rather than golden calves at Bethel.

Let us conclude with some brief observations. Origen is the first Christian writer to identify the treasures of Egypt with the encyclical disciplines and in doing so clearly follows Philo's *Heir*. Origen, like Philo, seeks to walk in balance between an overly accommodative attitude and an overly isolationist attitude toward Greek learning. He clearly cares deeply that his students learn the encyclical subjects, and probably sees these as being helpful in the literal explication of the scriptures. He also sees philosophy as an important adjunct to theology perhaps in laying the groundwork for a philosophically mature theology based on prayerful allegorical interpretation. His allegory of the plundering of Egypt and the transformation of that plunder for the building of the tabernacle provides biblical warrant for such restricted usage and the allegory of Hadad outlines the dangers.

Origen is very leery of the Gnostic manner of plundering Egypt. They were overtly platonized and their heresy arose from their accommodative posture toward pagan learning accompanied by their reckless biblical interpretation. Origen taught his students not to follow any particular school too closely. Use philosophy to ask the right questions, and scripture allegorized by prayer and the spirit to get the right answers. All pagan learning finds its value as it aids in the interpretation of Scripture for the development of a sound Christian theology. Origen uses the narrative haggadic traditions to explicate the biblical text literally in terms of the *historikon*. It plays a role alongside geometry and other categories of encyclical education which aid in the interpretive aspect of hermeneutics. Origen appears, from this passage at least, to be more a biblical scholar than a philosopher. According to P. Beatrice, "One the whole, all these texts offer a sufficiently coherent picture of Origen's position: the literal arts and pagan philosophy, which constitute the wisdom of this world, can be redeemed only if they enter

the service of Christian theology and biblical exegesis.”⁴⁹ He is anxious, in our passage, to ward off excessive accommodation and only allows for restricted usage of philosophy as an adjunct to theology.

⁴⁹ “The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 172.

ST. AUGUSTINE

Augustine, of all the interpreters encountered thus far, is the most engaged in the question of the despoliation of Egypt; he treats the topic repeatedly and uniquely.¹ Only the two most piquant and exegetically unique passages—question 53 of *Eighty-Three Different Questions* and *Christian Instruction* 2.40—will be treated in detail.² Other texts will be discussed as they shed light on these selections. Because of the length of these two primary texts, I will summarize the portions less directly related to the topic treated here. Portions of greater interpretive importance in relation to the despoliation of Egypt will appear in Latin and in English translation. We shall also comment throughout on the similarities of his argument here to the case he presents in *Against Faustus the Manichean* (*Faust.* 22.71–3). These are treated together because both seek to address, in differing ways, the Manichean challenge, both present a literal-only defense, and both follow similar lines of reasoning. Folliet dates *Faust.* to 397–8, which, as we shall see below, is only several years after the date of composition for question 53 in *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII*.³

In paragraph one, Augustine lays out the general principle which guides his whole interpretation: God operates according to differing economies in the Old and New Testaments. These administrations vary

¹ On Augustine's positive estimation of the Jewish role in history and his mild tone when speaking about Judaism, see Paula Fredriksen, "Excaecati occulta Justitia Dei: Augustine on Jew and Judaism," in *Christianity in Relation to Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (ed. Everett Ferguson, New York: Garland, 1999) 37–62. She contends, against Blumenkranz (*Die Judenpredigt Augustins*, [Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1971]), that Augustine's irenic understanding of Judaism flows not from social encounters with the Jews themselves and is not an affirmation of Judaism *per se*. His untimely tolerance toward things Jewish flowed rather from his anti-Manichean theological efforts and functioned as an attendant to his affirmation of the goodness of the God of Israel. F. Harkins has argued, however, that Augustine's "hermeneutical Jew," while being theologically-constructed, in fact has been influenced by his actual contact with Jews. The "hermeneutical Jew" is constructed for actual Jews as potential proselytes and out of his allegorical biblical interpretation ("Nuancing Augustine's Hermeneutical Jew," *JST* 36.1 (2005): 41–64.

² For *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII* we follow the translation of D. Mosher, in Saint Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 90–95. All abbreviations follow those of John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) xiv–xvi.

³ Folliet, "La Spoliatio," 13.

in accordance with the development of the human race. “The whole series of generations from Adam to the end of the world is administered as if it were the life of a single man who from boyhood through old age marks off the progress of his life into different age levels.”⁴ God’s expectations vary in dependence upon human maturity similarly as a father expects better behavior of older children who should know better. One might even consider precepts suitable for children to be a sin if they were imposed upon adults. The highest virtue is clearly to, “Let the yes which you say be yes and the no, no.”⁵ Yet this command was given to those who had received all the promises of Jesus’ kingdom and for which this kind of moral perfection was conceivable. But for the world’s children, earthly joys are given that they might hope also for heavenly joys. The highest virtue is to deceive no one and the lowest is to deceive everyone. For those in between there is the virtue of deceiving one’s enemies only. And it is better yet to deceive one’s enemies by divine permission. Since God knows who deserves punishment and reward, his permission aims this deception toward heavenly purposes.

In paragraph 2 Augustine explains that God himself deceives no one, yet he confers rewards on the worthy and punishment on the guilty in accordance with their just desserts. If someone merits deception, God does not personally deceive but deceives through the agency of a person of a lower station in moral nature. He does this to bring about punishment of the guilty and/or the cleansing of those who are spiritually reborn. Augustine provides I Kings 22:20–23, the story of God’s commissioning an angel of deception, as biblical support. God did not deceive Ahab himself and didn’t command an angel of higher nature but one of lower nature (a lying spirit) to execute this unseemly task. In the earthly realm we see a similar reality; a judge doesn’t personally execute the condemned but employs an executioner for the nasty task of dispatching the condemned. God uses persons as instruments of

⁴ Mosher, *Eighty-Three*, 90. In *C. Faust.*, Augustine says, “The people at that time were still carnal, and engrossed in earthly affections” (trans. of R. Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Augustine: The Writings Against the Manicheans, and Against the Donatists* (repub., Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:299. It is clear in what follows that this refers to the carnal nature of the Israelites who, by their love of earthly kingdoms, were suited to carry out God’s just punishment on Egypt. Similarly as in *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII*, Augustine’s emphasis is not that the Jews were particularly carnal, but that the human race was carnal, and the Jews reflected that carnality particularly.

⁵ Mosher, *Eighty-Three*, 90 (quoting Matt 5:37).

justice for which these harsher realities are appropriate; that is, vessels through which divine punishment flows are suited by nature for this labor. “The result is this: not only does justice itself use (instruments of punishment) to command someone to suffer something which it is fitting for him to suffer, but also justice inflicts the suffering through those instruments for whom it is no less appropriate to do such.”⁶

Accordingly on the one hand the Egyptians deserved being deceived (*Quapropter cum et Aegyptii deceptione digni essent*), and on the other the people of Israel were then situated at such a level of morality, in accordance with that age of the human race (*et populus Israel pro illa aetate generis humani in tali adhuc morum gradu constitutus esset*), that it was not unworthy of them to deceive an enemy (*ut non indigne hostem deciperet*). It therefore came about that God commanded them (or, rather, permitted them because of their desire) (*factum est ut iuberet Deus, uel potius pro illorum cupiditate permitteret*) to ask of the Egyptians gold and silver implements which these seekers of a kingdom as yet earthly were gazing upon longingly, without the intention to return them, and to take them as if they were going to return them (Exod 3:22) (*ut uasa aurea et argentea, quibus adhuc terreni regni appetitores inhiabant, et peterent ab Aegyptiis non reddituri et acciperent quasi reddituri*). God did not want to be unjust in the matter of the reward for such lengthy hardship and labor—a reward adapted to the level of such souls (*Quam et mercedem tam diuturni laboris atque operis pro talium animarum gradu non iniustam deus esse uoluit*); nor did he want to be unjust in the matter of the punishment of the Egyptians, whom appropriately enough he caused to lose what they were under obligation to pay (*et poenam illorum quos digne fecit amittere id quod reddere debuerunt*).⁷

God thus should not be thought of as a deceiver but as a rewarder of just rewards and penalties.⁸ Some things which are suitable to God’s

⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁷ Ibid. Latin text from *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, (ed. A. Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44a, Turnhout, 1975), 89.

⁸ We see a similar concept in Augustine’s 8th Sermon, although in this context Augustine claims that, if a real injustice occurred, God would have brought about some sort of remuneration for theft. After heaping scorn on those who find fault with God, he says, “So then, they did it, God did it (*Itaque fecerunt illi, fecit deus*). If they had been committing a theft, even in this case God would have willed that those who suffered should suffer, when he permitted those who did it to do it. However, he would have kept a punishment in store for the thieves, and would have exacted some temporal compensation for those who suffered from the theft. But as it is, they didn’t do it of their own accord; God in his own just judgment wanted it done.” Translation of E. Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century, Sermons I (1–19) on the Old Testament* (Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1990), 249. For Latin text, see *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Sermones De Vetere Testamento* (ed. Cyrille Lambot, CCSL 41, Turnhout, 1961), 91 and 93).

nature, God does himself. Other things which are beneath his glory he does by creatures for whom those tasks are well-suited, yet these tasks are carried out in accordance with his laws. God both commands some things to be done and permits others to be done.⁹

Paragraph 3 continues with the theme that God's punishment is carried out by persons who are obedient to his laws; just punishments, though unseemly and beneath God's nature, are yet just. Augustine quotes Wis 12:15–18 to buttress his contention that God remains in tranquility even when he must judge because he knows his judgment to be just and compassionate. In Paragraph 4, Augustine insists that the earthly rewards which God provides are the first step towards heavenly righteousness. That is, earthly blessings can be a means by which the soul is taught to look for heavenly rewards which befit a soul being made more stable. But it remains that souls are taught in accordance with their degree of maturity.¹⁰ What happened to the Jews, because of their maturity level was true of all persons, in that this principle holds true; a carnal people can be commanded one thing which would be beneath the dignity of a more spiritually advanced people. Israel deceived a people who deserved to be deceived because they could not yet live up to the principle, "Love your enemies." Rather, they lived in accordance with the ruling, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy."¹¹ "Therefore a beginning was made under a tutor, while the completion was reserved for the teacher. Nonetheless, it was the same God who gave the tutor to the children, viz., the Law which was given through

⁹ In *Faust.*, in the same paragraph, Augustine goes farther by claiming as a certain conclusion that since God himself had judicially commanded the despoliation, it would have been a sin for Moses to not issue the command to despoilate Egypt. Interestingly, Augustine offers, earlier in the same context, the possibility that the plundering and deception of Egypt issued not so much by the command of God as by his permission; "Perhaps, indeed, it was not so much a command as a permission to the Hebrews to act in the manner according to their own inclinations; and God, in sending the message by Moses, only wished that they should thus be informed of His permission" (trans., Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 4:299). Augustine clearly hasn't considered that, this being the case, he can hardly claim as he does, that Moses would have been sinning if he hadn't ordered the plunder of Egypt. How can one sin by not doing what is permitted? Admittedly, he presents the permission theory as a possibility only and he does have a tendency to give varying solutions to the same problem. However, the despoliation cannot possibly have issued only from God's permissive will if his conclusion is correct—that Moses' refusal to carry through on God's command to plunder Egypt would have been a sin.

¹⁰ Augustine provides John 16:12 and I Cor. 3:1–2 here as biblical support.

¹¹ Matt 5:43–44.

his servant, and the teacher to the more mature, viz., the gospel which was given through his only Son.”¹²

We ask again our methodological questions. Firstly, how does Augustine interpret the text in making his point? Secondly, what is unique to Augustine and what is common to other interpreters. Lastly, how is this interpretive impetus relevant to Augustine’s historical environs? G. Folliet notes that central to Augustine’s case is that God did not command the despoliation of Egypt so much as he permitted it.¹³ It is possible that his reading of the biblical text itself accounts for this since the verb used to describe the upcoming events could be understood as future tense in both the Vulgate and the Vetus Latina. In Augustine’s Vetus Latina of Exod 3:22 he read, “*poscet mulier a uicina et ab inquilina sua vasa argentea et aurea et uestem.*”¹⁴ For Exod 11:2, Augustine’s text had, “*Loquere ergo secreto in aures populi, et petat unusquisque a proximo et mulier a proxima uasa argentea et aurea et uestem.*”¹⁵ Augustine possibly understood this as, “Speak secretly...that each man and woman *may* request...” The fact that we do not technically have the people commanded to ask for Egyptian goods may be all the excuse Augustine needed for his claim that we are dealing with more permission than injunction.

God permitted this in accordance with Israelite desire (*pro illorum cupiditate*). Augustine mentions the gold and silver implements (*uasa aurea et argentea*) but not *vestemque plurimam* probably because he focuses primarily on the more egregious problem of taken gold and silver treasures. He describes these treasures as coveted by Israel since they were seekers of a kingdom “as yet earthly” (*quibus adhuc terreni regni appetitores inhiabant*). In making his point, he intends to contrast Israel seeking its own land and nationality to the Christian pursuit of the heavenly Kingdom of God. Augustine rather honestly admits that the biblical story smacks of deception. God permitted Israel to take

¹² Mosher, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 95.

¹³ “La Spoliatio,” 11.

¹⁴ *Locutionum in Heptateuchum libri 7* (ed. I. Fraipont, CCSL 33, Turnhout, 1958), 405.

¹⁵ Ibid., 411. Of course, the verb could be an imperative, but perhaps Augustine preferred to read it as a future in order to find the despoliation permitted by not commanded. The Vulgate reading of Exod 3:22 is, “*sed postulabit mulier a vicina sua*” and Vulg. 11:2: “*dices ergo omni plebi ut postulet vir ab amico suo et mulier a vicina sua.*” These Vulgate readings are also of interest here since from about 400 onwards, Augustine made use of Jerome’s translation. See G. Bonner, “Augustine as Biblical Scholar” in *Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome* (eds. P. Ackroyd and C. Evans, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1:545.

these treasures as if they planned to return them later. For this kind of confession to be made, Augustine clearly read the story carefully, noting that Moses never unambiguously asks for the complete release of Israel and Pharaoh's assumption throughout the whole plague sequence assumes Israel's return from the desert (see Introduction). Yet, God's plan for this rather unseemly circumstance is to justly reward Israel for its unpaid years of lengthy hardship and to punish Egypt for its excessive cruelty and unwillingness to pay. He caused Egypt to give over what they were unwilling to pay (*poenam illorum quos digne fecit amittere id quod reddere debuerunt*).

Here we see again vestiges of the 'fair wage' and 'just punishment' hermeneutic traditions which we have documented above.¹⁶ But what is unique to Augustine's treatment of this passage? It is completely unique that Augustine treats the whole passage in terms of the moral development of the human race. This theme does appear elsewhere in Augustine in a context which treats the despoliation of Egypt. In *Enarrations on the Psalms* (104.28) while explaining the historical Psalm 105 which in verse 37 tells of the gold and silver with which God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, Augustine says that the Israelites were rewarded for their toils in Egypt because "even these such as they were, were unable to condemn the justly earned yet temporal payment" (*quia et ipsi tales erant, qui nondum possent contemnere laborum suorum licet temporalem, tamen debitam iustamque mercedem*).¹⁷ Augustine goes on to say again here that the despoliation of Egypt was not commanded but permitted with the result that, the Hebrews, due to their cupidity, deceived the Egyptians to gain back what the Egyptians owed them. There is not a hint of anti-Semitism in either reading since he insists that it is not the Jews who are spiritual children but the whole human race was in that condition at that time. Therefore, with a clear progressive revela-

¹⁶ The themes of "just reward and punishment" arises again in paragraph 2 of *Faust*. "Why should not the Egyptians, who were unrighteous oppressors, be spoiled by the Hebrews, a free people, who would claim payment for their enforced and painful toil, especially as the earthly possessions which they thus lost were used by the Egyptians in their impious rites, to the dishonor of the Creator? (tr., Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 4:300). Interestingly, Augustine does not claim the treasures were used to construct the wilderness tabernacle as did Irenaeus and Origen. In this context, Augustine argues that, if Faustus can accept Matthew's story of Jesus' sending the demons into a herd of swine belonging to an innocent bystander (Matt 8:31–32), on what basis can he reject the command to plunder Egypt when it was a case of just reward and punishment?

¹⁷ *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CCSL 40, Turnhout, 1956), 1547.

tion theory in the background, Augustine understands the passage in terms of God's periodic allowances for sub-standard behavior due to the spiritual condition of the human race. The divine permission to deceive functions under this heading; God allows those to lie who are not ready for the words, "Let your yes be yes and your no no." All this is guided by a providence which sought to bring about just rewards and punishments yet was willing (because of human developmental infancy) to use inferior instruments to do so. Folliet seems a bit off mark in saying that central to Augustine's argument is the idea that God permitted the despoliation rather than commanded it.¹⁸ Rather, it is the notion of progressive revelation based on human spiritual development which drives Augustine's interpretation. It is the fact that God is working with a human race as yet not fully morally developed that requires God to act in such a fashion. This strikingly modern-sounding argument justifies the moral problem uniquely without appeal to allegory; God was working with people at their level of understanding to reveal a higher truth.

Folliet also claims Augustine's exegesis seeks to respond to the Manicheans who had accused the Old Testament God of having incited Israel to theft based on a deception.¹⁹ This also is not exactly the case. When, a few years before the end of his life (430), Augustine wrote his *Retractions*, he reflects about, among other things, what he had written in *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII*. In his remarks, he tells when, why, how and for whom this was written.²⁰ There, he describes that before he became a bishop, his brothers asked him questions on various topics whenever they saw him unoccupied. He wrote down answers on many leaves of paper which he had collated after he was ordained as bishop and numbered so anyone could find what they wanted to read. Mosher deduces that, while Augustine actually claims that there was no specific thematic order to the final form of the book, the principle of organization seems to have been chronological.²¹ Question 53 he has grouped with questions

¹⁸ Folliet, "La Spoliatio," 11. He writes of the passage in *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII*, "Le contexte insiste sur la *permission éventuelle du mensonge*, pour légitimer dans le cas, de la part des Hébreux soupçonnés quelque peu de cupidité et de désir de conquêtes terrestres (*amatores terreni regni*), la restitution de biens que les Égyptiens leur avaient injustement retenus."

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mosher, in Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 1. This passage is to be found in *Retractions* 1:26.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

51–65 which all deal with specifically biblical questions (as opposed to the philosophical and theological bent to groups one and two). In fact, Augustine’s biblical focus continues on to question 76 and this coincides with Augustine’s ordination as priest in 391. Mosher thus adopts 391 as the *terminus a quo* and 394/5 the *terminus ad quem* for these biblical questions.²² He ties Augustine’s spike in interest in biblical *quaestiones* with his plea of 391 to his bishop for more time for biblical study in order to be properly prepared for the priesthood (*Epist.* 21.3–6 in PL 33.88–90). Before this time, certainly Augustine perused the Bible; his debates with the Manicheans obliged him to study Genesis especially.²³ But the Manicheans also found fault with the god of the exodus; for as Augustine quotes Faustus, “It cannot be admitted that the true God, who is also good, ever gave such a command.”²⁴ This troubled one of Augustine’s brothers who, knowing of Augustine’s study of scripture, brought the question to the young priest. While question 53 of *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII* seeks to respond to issues raised by the Manicheans, it does not mention the Manicheans directly and is actually a response to one of his Catholic brothers who brought this problem raised by the Manicheans to Augustine’s attention.

What is interesting here is that Augustine staked so much on a strictly literal justification both in Question 53 of *Div. quaest. LXXXIII* and *Faust.*, rather than noting, as Gregory of Nyssa so aptly does (see below), that the apparent moral difficulty was intended only as a pointer to a spiritual meaning and could not be resolved literally without offending moral truth. Augustine, as we shall see, was not only aware of the allegorical interpretation of the despoliation but its chief advocate; he could have easily have appealed to allegory to solve the problem. He had been taught by Ambrose that the superficial difficulties of the Bible point to the “depth of the mysteries” (*sacramenorum*) being taught; that is, where the literal offends one’s sense of right and wrong, the reader is called beyond the literal to the *sacramentum*.²⁵ Spiritual exegesis is required when the text says something unworthy of God or is inconsistent with Christian faith (*On Genesis against the Manicheans* 2.2.3). Augustine

²² *Ibid.*, 17.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Faust.*, 22.72 (tr. Stothert, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 4:300).

²⁵ R. Norris Jr., “Augustine and the Close of the Ancient Period,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, (eds. A. Hauser and D. Watson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1:383 and 395. See *Conf.* 5.14.24 and 6.4.5–6.

wrote *Gen. Man.* in 388 or 389 soon after his conversion to Christianity and his primary audience was those he had drawn into that sect and the uneducated ones of the Catholic faith who were easy prey for the Manichean objections to the Old Testament. He made free use of the absurdity principle he learned from Ambrose to explain the objections raised by the Manicheans to such a degree that some commentators have noted that he runs the risk of destroying the literal or historical sense.²⁶ Augustine's justification for this is the impossibility of taking the text in its proper sense without avoiding blasphemy, impiety or absurdity in speaking about God.²⁷ Much later (405–415), when he wrote *On Genesis Literally Interpreted*, he writes that when he wrote his first commentary on Genesis (*Gen. Man.*), he didn't yet know how to interpret the text in a literal manner that did not offend God's character or rationality. He even claims he had written his figurative interpretation "in order to avoid delay, I explained as briefly and as clearly as possible the figurative meaning of those things for which I could not find a literal interpretation" (*Gen. litt.* 8.2.5).²⁸ According to the perspective of this passage, figurative exegesis can result from laziness when the interpreter fails to extend the effort necessary to explain the passage in its proper or literal sense without blasphemy or absurdity.

In *Doctr. chr.* 3.10.14, we encounter a more liberal principle of figurative exegesis. "We must first explain the way to discover whether an expression is literal or figurative. Generally speaking, it is this: anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to the true faith should be taken as figurative."²⁹ Marrou says of this principle,

Nous en trouvons la théorie formulée dans le *de Doctrina christiana*: elle se résume en une loi fondamentale: tout ce qui dans l'Écriture ne se rapporte pas directement à la foi et aux mœurs doit être tenu pour figuré, *quidquid*

²⁶ R. Teske, "Criteria for Figurative Interpretation in St. Augustine," in *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture* (eds. D. Arnold and P. Bright, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 109.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 113. The translation is Teske's. Interestingly, Augustine seems to say almost the opposite elsewhere; allegorical interpretation is more pleasant because the very difficulty in searching it out provides more pleasure in finding it (*Doctr. chr.* 2.8). Also, the intellect pays more attention to allegory because it challenges one's powers of cognition. The principle of love ought to hinder the interpreter from being overly hasty in attributing evil to either good men or God himself (*Doctr. chr.* 3. 15 and 24).

²⁹ Translated by R. Green in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 147.

*in sermone divino neque ad morum honestatem, neque ad fidei veritatem proprie referri potest, figuratum est cognoscas.*³⁰

Here, as Marrou points out, Augustine's principle is quite different—that is, more expansive—than the strict absurdity principle. Here not only is the reader permitted to allegorize that which is contrary to good morals or true faith, but everything which is not directly related to them. As Teske notes, "This law maximizes the amount of Scripture that has a figurative sense, for a vast amount of Scripture does not in its proper or literal sense deal directly with matters of faith or of moral conduct."³¹ Teske concludes that the expansive theory of *Doctr. chr.* does not represent a change in perspective or practice in terms of Augustine's exegesis; the difference lies in articulation and audience. Augustine, in fact, practices allegorical exegesis, even in *Gen. Man.* in cases where the absurdity principle does not apply. His liberal principle of interpretation has guided him from the start. But the stricter principle of absurdity is articulated when the Manichean threat is in view since this was most helpful in his conversion and he hopes it will assist those who are outside the church. *Doctr. chr.* was intended for believers who are ready to engage in the hidden richness of the Word.³²

Teske's perspective has the following weakness; it may explain why Augustine articulated a stricter principle when the Manicheans are the implied audience, but it does not explain why Augustine would have sought to write another commentary on Genesis which followed a strictly literal interpretation. If this were the case, why would Augustine say, as he explicitly did above (*Gen. litt.* 8.2.5), that the figurative interpretation can actually be used by people who are too hasty (referring to himself writing his allegorical commentary on Genesis) to take the time to try to explain the text literally? In that context, he goes on to describe that he had learned, since his writing of the allegorical commentary, that the creation narrative could be explained in its proper non-allegorical mode of expression (9.2.5). Why would Augustine have written the literal commentary if he consistently held that the allegorical interpretation was preferable in virtually all cases? Most verses of the Bible do not immediately apply to Christian faith and piety.

³⁰ H. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique*, (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1983), 478.

³¹ Teske, "Criteria," 110.

³² *Ibid.*, 117.

Certainly he valued the literal level of interpretation more than this theory allows. Perhaps Augustine increasingly realized that many persons were not at all helped (or convinced) by allegorical interpretations in alleviating the moral/theological difficulties of the Bible; for these he wrote the literal interpretation of Genesis. One ought to try to defend the text (according to his more mature view), if at all possible, using literal interpretation especially for those who are not persuaded by the absurdity principle. When one is seeking to nourish the soul of the believer, one is permitted to allegorize virtually at will. In other words, Augustine lost confidence in allegory as the complete solution for answering the questions raised by those outside the church; a literal response must be a part of the biblical *apologia*. Bonner outlines two factors by which Augustine's exegesis became less allegorical and more typological and historical: the awareness that the allegorical explanations had little effect on the Manichees and the increasing appreciation—under the influence of Tyconius—for the importance of scripture as a record of human and divine actions in the ongoing story of salvation.³³

It is still surprising that Augustine comes so close to claiming that God himself was duplicitous in the way he allowed deception to transpire. While he explicitly rejects that God himself lied, he allows that God commanded (or permitted) the despoliation to occur and in so doing, made use of morally underdeveloped instruments who were willing to deceive to execute God's will. Augustine insists elsewhere (*On Lying* 9.14) that any deliberate telling of falsehoods is more or less sinful in every case. While a lie may be venial, venial sins are always avoidable (*The Spirit and Letter* 27.48). "Lying is an affront to God partly because, as Augustine emphasizes from his earliest Christian days, God himself is to be identified as Truth. But it is worth noting that the arguments which Augustine uses about lying are a special kind of 'agent-relative' consequentialism, where the consequences are not states of affairs but the condition of one's own soul."³⁴ Thus, the consequences of lying, even when it prevents suffering, are tragic for the one who tells the falsehood.

So why did Augustine come so close to claiming that God himself commanded perjury when he could have simply applied allegory to

³³ Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," 1:552–55.

³⁴ Rist, *Augustine*, 192.

the moral problem? We have already noted his increasing awareness of the need for a literal response. But beyond this, for Augustine, it is a sad reality of political and social life that compromises must be made in order to keep order (in this case, fair wages for work done). This is a regrettable vicious necessity because the consequences of such sins are unavoidable; for persons of authority; often killing and lying is necessary for the social good.³⁵ Augustine had a certain preoccupation with the results of certain unpleasant but necessary actions on the soul of the doer. This is especially evident in his understanding of capital punishment where the death sentence is pronounced by a judge but carried out by an executioner who is a bloodthirsty soul who would otherwise vent his cruelty on innocent people. In *Div. Quaest. LXXXIII* 2.12 he argues that, while a hangman is a necessary part of any well-ordered city, he is cruel, but his cruelty is used to a good end as a terror of evildoers.³⁶ In our passage, this forms part of Augustine's literal exegesis: just as human rulers must use the morally inferior to execute the greater good, so God used the mendacity and cupidity of the Jews to bring about divine justice. According to Rist, Augustine also allows for special exceptions for lying when doing "God's business."³⁷

This understanding of the tension between evil and goodness plays a role in Augustine's underlying theodicy which he summarizes, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to allow evil to exist" (*Ench.* 8:27). God brings good out of evil such that even moral evils contribute to the beauty of the whole. Like the dark colors in a painting, they contribute by making the whites more vivid and the whole painting more beautiful. "For Augustine not only wanted to follow the Christian (and Platonist) view that God is good, but the Christian view that he is all-powerful. He wanted to argue, in fact, that everything bad is either caused by a soul other than God, and is permitted by God for His 'Good' reasons, or is inflicted by God for reasons of justice."³⁸ We see these features in tension in our text: While God is good (he could not have lied actually), he permitted imperfect creatures to do what

³⁵ Ibid., 194 and 231.

³⁶ E. Fortin, *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 30 and 38 n. 19.

³⁷ Rist, *Augustine*, 231. For more on Augustine's views on lying, see Fortin, *Philosophic Christianity*, 32–33. He explains Augustine's complete prohibition against lying as a method of protecting the veracity of the Bible (God doesn't lie) and the credibility of those who preach it.

³⁸ Ibid., 262.

was wrong in order to achieve his greater good. Under the influence of Augustine's Platonic readings, he increasingly saw evil as one small element of a multi-faceted and mysterious universe whose God was more resilient than that of Mani.³⁹ In his own words (*Conf.* 7.13.19), "I had come to see that higher things are better than the lower, but that the sum of all creation is better than the higher things alone." In his disputations with Julian of Eclanum, Augustine was brought to task for drawing a distinction between human standards of equity and God's; it preserved the name of justice but nothing that resembles justice in substance. Augustine insisted that God's justice is inscrutable; God is essentially beyond justice and must not be judged by human standards.⁴⁰

We turn now to St. Augustine's most thoroughgoing allegorical treatment of our passage. Augustine began this work six years after his ordination as priest and three after he was consecrated bishop (397 C.E.). He left off his writing after completing two books and part of the third and the work was not completed until 426, four years before his death (a thirty-year hiatus). He wrote a year later in his *Retractions* (*Retract.* 2.4) that his views on Christian education had withstood the test of time; he makes only some minor qualifications to what he had written thirty years previously.⁴¹ When he began his work he already had nine years' experience as both a teacher and a teacher of teachers in North Africa during which time he realized the need for increased erudition among the priesthood to enable them to converse with cultivated pagans more effectively. This work flows directly from first-hand experience in the "propagation of Christian doctrine in a world still aggressively pagan."⁴² Augustine emphasizes the importance of general education as the first step in the preparation of Christian teachers since the teacher should be conversant with culture common to all educated men. Christian teachers demand at least the same level of preparatory education as secular teachers. In making this claim, he anticipates and counters a skeptical reaction by noting the manner in which God relies upon human agents to assist the person searching for truth (Preface,

³⁹ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 392–3.

⁴¹ G. Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 210.

⁴² *Ibid.*

6–7). When Augustine wrote his fourth book 30 years later, he is still on the defensive on this point; teacher training based on human resources is necessary (4.33).

A primary issue here has been the controversial question of the extent to which the liberal arts and the resources of secular culture should be incorporated into Christian education. Augustine's basic position is that the Christian must reject the spirit expressed in the pagan classics while embracing those good and beautiful elements. This liberal view had been expressed earlier in Clement's claim that all streams of knowledge converge into one larger stream of truth which those interested in defending the gospel must claim (*Strom.* 1.5 and 9). Augustine's position comes in response to the urgent need to provide a well-educated clergy and Christian laity who were capable of carrying on intelligent conversations with cultured pagans, and it is this posture of liberal Christian humanism that is the lasting legacy of *Doctr. chr.*⁴³

Doctr. chr. pays ample attention to the justification and explanation of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation. Because of the limitations of the human mind, the Bible had been veiled by God in order to prevent it from being easily interpreted by the superficial. Only the profound mind grasps the deeper meanings intended by the spirit. While many ancient philosophers assign such a function to allegory, Augustine goes on to comprehensively describe why allegory should have been necessary to begin with.⁴⁴ The fall of Adam had been a fall from direct knowledge of God into indirect knowledge through signs and the artifice of language and gestures. While some wise men, in typical philosophic tradition, were able to again grasp ineffable realities through direct intellection, the fall necessitated the remedy that was the Scriptures which, for Augustine, were "the countenance of God" (*Serm.* 22.7). The Scriptures bridged the communicative gap between humanity and a direct awareness of God with a prolix of imagery.⁴⁵ Into this task Augustine directed his enormous intellectual energy: "a mind that had once hoped to train itself for the vision of God by means of the Liberal Arts, would now come to rest on the solid, intractable mass of the Christian Bible."⁴⁶ By interpreting it allegorically, Augustine found in it all he valued as an academician and believer. The Bible became, for

⁴³ Howie, *Educational Theory*, 238.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Augustine*, 261.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

a world in which culture was understood primarily in terms of classical texts, a basis for a 'Christian culture' or a *doctrina Christiana*.⁴⁷

In establishing his vision of Christian culture, Augustine was remarkably at home with pagan culture. Many in the church sought to deny pagan culture altogether, and even Jerome trembled with the fear that Christ would judge him a Ciceronian and not a Christian. But for Augustine there was simply no substitute for culture. He was not confused by the tension and applied a few basic principles to the question. First, he noted that culture was the product of society and the normal extension of the fact of language (*Doctr. chr.* 2.4.5). In the same way, religion was also the product of the need to communicate; pagan cult was an agreed upon language between men and demons (2.24.37). Outside this context, non-Christian cult and culture were not a source of infection for the Christian (2.20.30). This maneuver, in effect, put both classical literature and all other pagan cultural assemblages onto neutralized secular footing. Thus, Augustine never sought to replace classical education but to create an environment for the development of literary culture "distinguished by being unselfconscious, unacademic, uncompetitive, and devoted to the understanding of the Bible alone."⁴⁸

Augustine's affinity for Platonic thought is well-known. He was under the influence of the Neo-Platonists, particularly Plotinus whom he read in the Latin translation of Victorinus. To Christians such as Origen, Ambrose and Augustine, Platonism seemed to be particularly compatible to Christian faith, as both were distinctly other-worldly.⁴⁹ When Augustine chose the way of philosophy, he could easily have turned to pagan Platonism which had considerable academic respectability in the 380's. Yet he turned instead to the writings of Paul; both Paul and Plato were 'in the air' and both were to him *virī magni*. He was an enthusiastic convert to a 'philosophy' which had already ceased to be independent but had increasingly been interwoven into the teachings of Paul so as to buttress solid Catholic piety.⁵⁰ His readings in philosophy had a distinct impact; Augustine was not a passive believer. He believed that his philosophical readings were fecund and had a distinct role to play even in a world dominated by revelation. Ambrose, for all his use

⁴⁷ Ibid., 263.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 92–93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 105.

of pagan authors, actually seems to have retained an older view; and this remains a central difference between the two men. Ambrose felt himself bound to the prestige of Christian scholarship of the Greek world—above all to Origen. Augustine was less constricted by the past and able to chart his own trajectory and so to “a firm belief that a mind trained on philosophical methods could think creatively within the traditional orthodoxy of the church.”⁵¹

Central in this process of cultural integration is our passage (*Doctr. chr.* 2.40.60–61). It is here he provides the primary biblical justification for the liberal posture toward pagan culture, an exegesis which generally but uniquely follows the allegorical lines laid down previously by Origen.⁵²

60.a. Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm (*non solum formidanda non sunt*), but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them (*sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda*). Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens, which the people of Israel hated and shunned (*quae populus Israhel detestaretur et fugeret*) but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold and clothes (*sed etiam uasa atque ornamenta de auro et argento et uestem*), which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously (*clanculo*) claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God’s command—*non auctoritate propria sed praecepto Dei*), and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use) [Exod 3:21–2, 12:35–6]—(60.b) similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ’s guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth (*liberales disciplinas usui veritatis aptiores*), and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere (*quasi metallis divinae providentiae quae ubique infusa est*)—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons (*quo perverse atque iniuriose ad obsequia daemonum abutuntur*) must be removed by Christians, as they separate

⁵¹ Ibid., 113.

⁵² Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (ed. M. Simonetti, Verona: 1994) 118. I follow the translation of R. Green in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 124–126 to which I will add some Latin text and the subdivisions 60.a,b and 61.a,b.

themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. As for their clothing—which corresponds to human institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life we cannot do without—this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes.

61.a. This is exactly what many good and faithful Christians have done. We can see, can we not, the amount of gold, silver, and clothing with which Cyprian, that most attractive writer and most blessed martyr, was laden when he left Egypt; is not the same true of Lactantius, and Victorinus, of Optatus, and Hilary, to say nothing of people still alive, and countless Greek scholars? Isn't this what had been done earlier by Moses himself, that most faithful servant of God, of whom it is written that he was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians [Acts 7:22]? 61.b. Pagan society, riddled with superstition, would never have given to all these men the arts which it considers useful—least of all at a time when it was trying to shake off the yoke of Christ and persecuting Christians—if it had suspected that they would be adapted to the purpose of worshipping the one God, by whom the worship of idols would be eradicated. But they did give their gold and silver and clothing to God's people as it left Egypt, little knowing that the things they were giving away would be put back into the service of Christ (*nescientes quemadmodum illa quae dabant, in Christi obsequium redderentur*). The event narrated in Exodus was certainly a figure, and this is what it foreshadowed. (I say this without prejudice to any other interpretation of equal or greater importance.)

First we ask, "How is Augustine interpreting the biblical text to fit it into his argument?" In 60.a., the Hebrew people had to choose between taking good and bad treasures. They discriminated against bad Egyptian treasures (idols, etc.) for good treasures (gold and silver vessels and clothes). This is, of course, not in the Bible nor have we encountered it in the rabbinic traditions.⁵³ Augustine adds this element to the story on the literal level to make the argument work better in allegory; this depicts the need for the Christian theologian to pick and choose between good and bad ideas in Greek philosophy. This theme he expands in 61.b.—the theologian is to discriminate between the "false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary labor" and the "fields of bountiful knowledge apt for the use of the truth, and useful precepts dealing with ethics." Primarily he notes a Christian should consider philosophical monotheism a beneficial theological resource. Augustine adds gold and silver *ornamenta* to the biblical *uasa* probably

⁵³ Mek (Piskha 13) has almost the exact opposite idea—Israel took idols from Egypt specifically to destroy them. "And they despoiled the Egyptians" shows that that their idols melted and ceased to exist (as idols) and returned to their initial state."

in light of the ostensible use of these treasures for the ornamentation of the wilderness tabernacle.

Another interesting element for his hermeneutic is the notion that the Egyptians were lending the Israelites things unknowingly (*nescienter*). We have repeatedly noted above the fact that the narrative logic of the biblical story demands that the Egyptians believed that the Jews would return with their borrowed treasures. So Augustine is pointing out that the Egyptians were loaning these treasures without knowledge of the Israelite plan of escape. Of course, this is the very feature in the story which causes the moral difficulty for anti-Jewish and Gnostics antagonists of all stripes. There may be another biblical connection. Augustine is one of the few, if not the only exegete, who allows that the despoliation was carried out in secret (*clanculo*—60.a above). This clearly reflects the κρυφῇ of LXX Exod 11:2. We have an Augustinian reading of Exod 11:2 which renders it similarly: *loquere ergo secreto in aures populi*.⁵⁴ The secrecy of the affair has importance for Augustine here since, as we noted, in the allegory, Christians could only secretly plunder the intellectual riches of the Greek world. Otherwise, Greeks would not have shared had Christians been open about their ultimate allegiances and intentions.

Augustine is surprisingly comfortable with the notion that God commanded the plundering of Egypt and that this was done by asking for items to be loaned upon the expectation of their return. In other words, again Augustine allows that God commanded that the Egyptians be deceived and defrauded. This can be compared to the interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa, who in his *Life of Moses*, cannot accept that the same Moses whose laws forbade wrongdoing of one's neighbor could have commanded such a thing, even though it seems reasonable to some that the Israelites should have exacted fair wages for their unpaid labors. But this does not clear up the moral problem for him.

Yet there is no less ground for complaint; this justification does not purify such a command of falsehood and fraud, for the person who borrows something and does not repay the lender is deceitful. If he borrows something not belonging to him, he does wrong because he commits fraud. But even if he should take what is rightly his own he is still cor-

⁵⁴ P. Sabatier, *Biblicorum Sacrorum Latinae Versiones Antiquae* (Remis: Reginaldum Florentian, 1743), 155. The reading comes from *Quaestiones de Exodo* 39.

rectly called a deceiver since he misleads the lender into hoping that he will be repaid (2.114).⁵⁵

Gregory goes on to heal the text through allegory in the standard fashion (2.115). That is, the Christian is to equip himself with pagan learning (he mentions moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic specifically) since these things will be useful “when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason” (2:115). Augustine and Irenaeus are in the category that Gregory mentioned above; those who considered it reasonable that God could, in such a fashion, order a fair wage to be given, especially for the construction of the tabernacle. This deception of the Egyptians becomes important in Augustine’s exegesis; for in the allegory, it highlights the fact that the non-Christian world would never have allowed Christians their educational treasures had they known that the Christians would use these treasures for better purposes which, in the end, would spell the death of paganism itself. Augustine highlights God’s role in the deception noting that it occurred *non auctoritate propria sed praecepto Dei*.

The description, also in 60.a., of that taken from Egypt as “things the Egyptians were not using well” (*quibus non bene utebantur*) is also not in the Bible, and seems to function on two levels. First, on the literal level, it functions to justify God’s command that the Egyptian spoils be plundered. His command brings about the transfer of wealth from those who do not deserve it and are abusing it, to those who are worthy of it, and will make proper use of it. Second, it makes the allegory work better for Augustine since the wisdom of the philosophers, when converted into Christian usage, is put to use for the worship of the one true God.

In 61.b. we encounter the phrase, “These things they did not make themselves but they dug them up out of certain, as it were, mines of divine providence, which have been scattered about everywhere.”⁵⁶ This has absolutely no connection to the biblical text or previous exegesis and

⁵⁵ Translation of A. Malherbe and E. Ferguson in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 80–81.

⁵⁶ P. Beatrice notes that in his first Cassiciacum dialogue, *Contra Academicos* (III.17.38), which dates to the Milanese period, Augustine claims that Arcesilaus hid the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul in the ground to be found by posterity. “Augustine was thinking of Platonism precisely as the ‘Egyptian’ gold and silver the pagans dug from the mines of providence, as he was to write ten years later in *De doctrina christiana* II, 145. The image of the buried treasure was the same” (“The Treasures of Egypt,” 181).

is an interesting phrase because it provides a glimpse into Augustine's rationale for openness to the philosophy of the Greeks. The truths they have discovered are God's truths, and were placed by his providence throughout the world to be discovered through inquiry. This is not the only place in Augustine's writings where this notion appears; in his *Conf.* (7.9.15) he compares the Platonic doctrine of the *Logos* with the better teachings of Christianity:

Et ego ad te [Deum] ueneram ex gentibus et intendi in aureum, quod ab Aegypto uoluisti ut auferret populus tuus, quoniam tuum erat, ubinque erat.

And so I came to You [Lord] from the Gentiles, and I sought gold which You wanted Your people to take from Egypt since it was Yours wherever it was.

Here again God intends the despoliation to occur since these treasures belong to God in the first place. This is very similar to what we have above; God providentially places his truths in the world wanting them to be plundered by all who are able; all truth is God's truth. This may be best understood against the background of the Stoic notion of the *spermatikos logos* which is known to have played such a large role in Justin's belief that Christ was the embodiment of the *logos* of which every person partakes. For Justin, it was this doctrine that explained natural revelation as the ethical and religious knowledge possessed by all human beings.⁵⁷ This doctrine of seminal reason underlies Stoic belief in a natural law which claims that a seed of goodness is common to all humanity. It has been planted by God in humans at birth and, with pedagogical cultivation, is able to blossom into virtue. One Greek fragment reads, "By nature, we are all born with the seeds of virtue. . . . We must develop them with learning of virtue."⁵⁸ God is both the original seed or seminal force (*spermatikos*) and the original reason (*logos*) that determines the shape and qualities of all that is. God is the source of both the matter and the pattern of everything. He allows matter to change from one material form to another but retains within it "a permanent identity, an inherent law of process, the *logos*."⁵⁹ It is by the cultivation of the *spermatikos logos* that a man can become virtuous

⁵⁷ A. Droge, "Justin Martyr and the Restoration of Philosophy" *CH* 56 (1987): 313.

⁵⁸ Quoted by M. Horowitz, "The Stoic Synthesis of the Idea of Natural Law in Man: Four Themes" *JHI* 35 (1974): 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

and by which one understands the virtues of goodness, justice and wisdom.

Yet the notion that pagans could appreciate the truths of God providentially left scattered about the universe seems to grate against his general pessimism about human potential elsewhere. For in comparison with Origen, Augustine's view of the soul does not involve ascent and descent depending upon its inherent merits. All mankind deserves all the suffering it gets. Origen's optimistic view of human nature is excluded, for Augustine, by the miseries of human life beyond deserving. All consequences of the catastrophic sin of Adam are transmitted to his descendents with compounding interest. For Augustine, freedom is not a genetic feature of rational being as it was with Origen; he chooses a more deterministic doctrine of the soul; foreknowledge and predestination are both causative and inescapable such that the notion of free choice must be radically reinterpreted downward.⁶⁰ In Letter 167 to Jerome, Augustine denies that any true virtue can be possessed by non-Christians.⁶¹ While one can easily understand how Origen and Justin Martyr could have the sunny view that pagan learning has a role in divine providence, it does sit uncomfortably in Augustine's darker reality. The presence of such a theme in Augustine must be accounted to the influence of such a potent Stoic tradition, the necessity of some sort of cultural accommodation, the appreciation Augustine could not escape for literature, and the secularization of pagan culture which we have above described. It was perhaps the doctrine of *spermatikos logos* that gave Augustine the avenue to make adjustments and accommodations.

Toward the end of 60.b., we read, "As for their clothing—which corresponds to human institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life we cannot do without—this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes." This refers to the Christian takeover of the social guilds and institutions, a topic which takes up much of Augustine's attention in *Doctr. chr.* 2.38ff. In the view of all the Greek philosophies except the Epicureans, the institutions of Greek culture were means by which the soul is bettered and perfected. The city and

⁶⁰ H. Chadwick, "Christian Platonism in Origen and Augustine," in *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies* (eds., Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel, Edizioni Dell'Ateneo, 1985), 222–23.

⁶¹ See J. Langan, "Augustine on the unity and the interconnection of the virtues," *HTR* 72 (1979): 81–95.

all its institutions functioned for the development of human excellence; man as a social creature was nurtured in the right kind of political and social environment. When Augustine converted in Milan to the Platonic Christianity of Ambrose, he embraced Christ as his mediator and the classical view that perfection was possible in this life. Even so, from the time of Augustine's conversion, he consistently recognized the effects of the fall on human nature and its limited moral capabilities.

Later, with his rediscovery of Paul, his ensuing conception of the effects of original sin became harsher and increasingly pessimistic; that is, his attitude became less and less classical. For instance, in the *Retractions*, he reproves himself for identifying the Kingdom of God with a comprehension of Platonic forms. Society, in this Platonic construct, exists as the lower part of the hierarchy of being stretching down from God to matter.⁶² Augustine later rejected this Platonic notion of society, and increasingly demanded that the Platonists themselves, while oriented properly toward the immaterial, were motivated by pride and demon-worship. Yet, while he personally withdrew from the world and its institutions as a monk and priest, he recognized the world as a place where the Christian and non-Christian must interact, where God's word and kingdom must be extended. By the 390s, it became urgent to him to understand the structures of secular society and their relationship to the possibilities of Christian life.⁶³ While he offered no clear formulation for this relationship, it is clear that the social institutions of Roman culture were to be despoiled in that what things they had of value were to be employed for the development of Christian culture. Eusebius of Caesarea went farther in claiming that Rome itself and all its social institutions had become, in Constantine's Christianized empire, a divine vehicle to promote the spread of Christian culture.⁶⁴

Augustine justifies this exegetical jump from biblical vestments plundered to social institutions by the fact that certain schools and guilds were known for their distinctive dress, a fact he notes in *Doctr. chr.* 2.39–40. In that context, Augustine explores possibilities for Christians to partake in such social institutions. He uses similar language there as we have encountered in our text; social institutions are a variety of human arrangements that are helpful for the necessary intercourse of

⁶² Rist, *Augustine*, 204–5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

life. A Christian is not to neglect them but pay them sufficient attention. Here we see that Augustine's notion of the despoliation has broadened from that which we encountered in Origen. There, the despoliation included encyclical learning and philosophy. In our text, the believer is to make use of all Roman institutions for Christian purposes. This reflects increasing Christian presence in all levels of Roman life. Marrou describes Augustine's goals for the process of analysis and accommodation of all the features of ancient culture: to isolate those unhelpful elements associated with paganism itself, and to purify, refashion and utilize the rest.⁶⁵ Of Augustine Marrou says, "il montre tout ce que la connaissance des sciences et des techniques scolaires de la culture profane peut apporter de secours efficace à l'intellectuel chrétien qui veut consacrer ses efforts à l'étude de la Bible."⁶⁶ Augustine was after more than the Christianization of literature; he sought to despoliate even the social institutions of Rome for the Lordship of Christ.

Augustine's interpretation became broader yet when he applied the Egyptian clothing to the many languages entering into the church. In *Sermon* 8.16, Augustine says, in describing the despoliation: "The clothes, however, with which, as it were, the senses are clothed, are various languages."⁶⁷ He goes on to describe the voices of many languages and dialects which could be heard with the people of God traveling out of Egypt. Perhaps the connection here is that peoples of different cultures can be identified by both their distinctive dress and language. Also in this context, the gold and silver of Egypt are not the wisdom of the non-Christian world but the sages themselves (*sapientes*—particularly, St. Cyprian is mentioned). Of this passage, Folliet says, "Augustin met en relief l'interprétation plus classique de ce thème de la *spoliatio Aegyptiorum*, insistant sur le emprunts que les auteurs chrétiens ont fait aux païens sur le plan culturel, et voit en Cyprien le modèle parfait de cette symbiose en le comparant à l'or et l'argent pris aux Égyptiens "*Cyprianus fuit aliquando uel aurum uel argentum Aegyptiorum*."⁶⁸ Clearly, Augustine's interpretations were quite fluid and applicable to the pastoral needs of the moment. Michele Pellegrino says of Augustine's biblical exegesis, "It cannot be said that in Augustine's view the Bible contains within

⁶⁵ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 393.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "*Vestes autem, quibus quodam modo sensus induuntur, linguae sunt uariae.*" Augustine, *Sermones*, 93. For full English translation, see Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 249–50.

⁶⁸ Folliet, "*La Spoliatio*," 14.

itself all the tools for interpreting it. Two or more interpretations can be given of the some passages, and all of them are true when in conformity with the faith (*secundum fidem*).”⁶⁹

Throughout this passage Augustine interprets on both the literal and allegorical levels. Yet his primary aim is to make the point of the allegory, not to defend or exonerate God or the Bible. In this case, he is neither healing the text through allegory nor arguing for a literal justification but seeking to maneuver the text on the literal level to fit his purposes in the allegory and thereby provide biblical justification for his main point.

Concerning Augustine’s use of previous exegesis, we see, in several places, the assumption that the treasures taken from Egypt were used for the building of the tabernacle. This is never explicitly stated but it does seem to be assumed. In 60.a Augustine speaks of the better use made of the treasures of Egypt by their new owners. 60.b describes the previous use of the wealth of Egypt for the worship of demons and, under new ownership (60.c.) for proclaiming the gospel. These treasures are converted for the worship of God in 61.b. For this, Augustine is probably dependant upon Origen, and the fact that he doesn’t spell this out in detail may indicate that it was already deeply embedded in the interpretive tradition.

As stated above, Augustine’s argument is dependent to some degree upon that found in Origen’s *Letter to Gregory*.⁷⁰ Yet Augustine shapes the allegory differently and with different interests. Origen is specific about which fields of knowledge can function as handmaidens to Christian theology and how they play their roles. Philosophy of the Greeks serves as a general education or introduction to Christian faith. Geometry and astronomy are useful in the interpretation of the Scriptures. As the philosophers claim that geometry, music, grammar and rhetoric are adjuncts to philosophy, so philosophy itself, for Origen, is an adjunct with regard to Christianity. Augustine is not as interested in the specifics of the relationship between philosophy and Christian theology.

⁶⁹ “General Introduction” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century, Sermons I (1–19) on the Old Testament* (tr. E. Hill, Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1990), 44. See also Bonner, “Augustine as Biblical Scholar,” 547.

⁷⁰ P. Beatrice believes Augustine to be indirectly dependant upon Origen, not through a Latin translation but that he “heard about Origen’s interpretation of the treasures of the Egyptians in the Milanese ecclesiastical environment from people who knew that text and made him aware of it (“The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 181).

As we saw was the practice of Augustine, Origen expands on the text at the literal level in order to make the allegory more effective. The Bible says nothing about these specific treasures being used in the construction of the tabernacle. They could have been used just as easily in the construction of the golden calf of Exod. 32. But for Origen, the treasures of Egypt are put to the use of divine worship. The use of the treasures for divine worship is present in Augustine. But also in paragraph 2 he says that Greek philosophy has useful precepts dealing with ethics. In paragraph 3 above, he says that the treasures of Egypt are to be put to use in the preaching of the gospel. Here, philosophical ideas are used to expound on the Christian message so that the educated pagans will take its message seriously and perhaps convert.

One very telling difference is evident between Origen's and Augustine's interpretation. For Augustine, there are many examples of Christians who have used pagan learning rightly. He says (61.a. above);

For what else have our many good and faithful done? Do we not see with what great quantity of gold and silver and garments Cyprian, that most persuasive and blessed martyr, stuffed his pockets and made his exit from Egypt? How about Lactanius? Consider Victorinus, Optatus and Hilary. Their spoils were so great that I need say nothing of those who are still alive.

In what follows he notes that an innumerable number of Greek theologians have successfully plundered Egypt. Origen is of the opposite opinion; for him, hardly anyone can navigate this balancing act rightly. In paragraph 3 of his letter to Gregory, we read,

I could speak from knowledge gained by experience that few are those who have taken anything useful from Egypt and have come out from there and have prepared objects for the worship of God, but many have followed the example of Hadad, the Idumaeen. These are those who have used some Greek ingenuity to beget heretical ideas and have, so to speak, prepared golden calves in Bethel, which means 'house of God.'

This highlights a fundamental distinction between the two interpreters. While it is quite probable that Augustine is influenced by Origen in this passage, his posture is not nearly so negative or anxious about pagan learning. Origen's concerns about the spread of Gnosticism are reflected by his anxiety along with the simple fact that he had fewer successful examples at which he could point than did Augustine. Augustine's enthusiasm results in part from the success of Origen's exegesis and example. Augustine begins our passage with the bold claim that,

not only should pagan learning not be feared, it should be claimed for Christian usage (*sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda*).

He has been preceded in this optimistic attitude by Gregory of Nyssa, who in his *Life of Moses* (2:113–116), says that the allegorical meaning of this story, “commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves” (2:115). Gregory, somewhat like Augustine, also provides Basil as a historical example of the man who successfully plunders Egypt. “For many bring to the Church of God their profane learning as a kind of gift: Such a man was the great Basil, who acquired the Egyptian wealth in every respect during his youth and dedicated this wealth to God for the adornment of the Church, the true tabernacle” (2.116). In both cases, we see less anxiety about the appropriation of the intellectual traditions of the Greco-Roman intellectual tradition. Origen had few others than the Jewish Philo as a model of the successful appropriation of non-Christian learning specifically for the purpose of biblical exegesis. But Gregory and Augustine had many other heroes of faith whose learning had nourished their theological substance. This increasingly positive attitude reflects the historical situation after the time of Constantine when it was possible for a Christian to accept that Roman culture could have a positive role in salvation history.

THE DESPOLIATION: OTHER PATRISTIC TEXTS

In this excursus, we will briefly peruse the patristic texts up to the period of Augustine which are not surveyed in the body of this study.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND DESPOLIATION AS ‘SELF-PROTECTION’

Clement’s discussion of the despoliation of Egypt is a reprise of what we have encountered in Philo’s *Life of Moses*. Clement makes no secret of his abundant and authoritative use of Philo; in four cases (all in the *Stromateis*), he mentions him by name (once in the chapter we will discuss below—1.23). However, Clement’s use of Philo is predominantly anonymous. Philo’s influence on Clement has been carefully studied and delineated.¹ Clement is attracted to Philo primarily as a model for biblical interpretation. At times he jumps from one biblical text to the next in Philo in a manner which amounts to a ‘double borrowing.’ Philo provided Clement with pre-selected text combinations which he used in argumentation or interpretation almost as if he considered Philo a personal guide to the important biblical materials.² Clement did vary from and alter Philo—his concept of God, the position on the law. However, Clement’s attraction to Philo is based on the combination of factors he found linked together there: both brilliance in biblical exegesis and maturity of philosophical reasoning. “Many of the twisting threads of Clement’s theological thinking are taken from Philo but they are woven into a very different tapestry.”³

In the following passage, we find Clement weaving a different tapestry from what he found in Philo. Our text is *Stromata* 1.23.157.2–4 which Folliet dates ca. 211–16.⁴

¹ A. Van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: an Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). For an excellent survey of other studies, see Runia, *Philo*, 132–156. See also P. Beatrice, “The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 163.

² Van den Hoek, *Clement* 220–221.

³ *Ibid.*, 229–230.

⁴ Folliet, *La Spoliatio*, 6.

(2) Subsequently, the Hebrews in their exodus left, carrying a great deal of Egyptian spoil, not out of love of material goods as their detractors suggest (ὥς οἱ κατήγοροι φασιν) (God forbade them even to covet the possessions of others), (3) but, in the first place, taking their proper pay for all the time of service they had given the Egyptians, and secondly, protecting themselves (ἡμύναντο) by a kind of retributive act against the money-changing Egyptians by carrying off spoil, since they had mistreated the Hebrews by enslaving them. (4) So, as anyone might speak of it as an act of war, they thought they were justified in carrying off their enemy's property by the law of conquest, stronger over weaker. (This was the cause of the war. The Hebrews came to the Egyptians as suppliants because of the famine. The Egyptians enslaved the foreigners and forced them into service just like prisoners of war, not even paying them wages.) If on the other hand we think of them as at peace, then they simply took the spoil as wages from unwilling hands which had for a long time robbed them by failing to pay them.⁵

The depth of borrowing is easily evident as one compares the above to Philo's literal justification in *Moses* 1.141–2. Clement summarizes the argument a bit. He makes no mention of Philo's argument that there is no comparison between material goods and freedom so that the Hebrews actually took much less than what had been taken from them. He also rearranges it to form a chiasm; that is, he alters Philo's peace/war—peace/war to the chiasmic peace/war—war/peace.⁶ Beatrice notes that, for Philo, the detractors of the Jews seem to be Egyptian pagans generally who did not look favorably on the wealth of the Jews, the detractors in Clement have a more specific designation (ὥς οἱ κατήγοροι φασιν) and are likely followers of Marcion for whom the despoliation

⁵ Translation of J. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis Books One to Three* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 139–40.

⁶ This occurs in paragraph 4. Van den Hoek argues that, in fact, this passage gives the impression of an untidy and confused argument. According to her, Clement ignores the psychological and theological nuances of Philo and only states baldly that the Hebrews took the spoils as some form of compensation (*Clement*, 57). Beatrice agrees (“The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 163). I do not share these assessments but believe Clement was in fact shaping Philo's argument into a chiasm that emphasized self-protection. Immediately upon introducing the *fair wage* in paragraph 3, Clement introduces the notion of despoliation as *self-protection*. As in the Ferguson translation above, ἡμύναντο refers to self-defense primarily. This explains why Clement drew this word forward in his presentation (it appears at the end of the Philo passage). Van den Hoek claims it was moved forward for no apparent reason (57). Yet, for Clement, whether the despoliation occurred during war or peace, the final motivation was self-protection. While this may have been a minor theme in Philo, to Clement it becomes a theme he seeks to emphasize by moving it forward and placing it in the center of his thesis.

of Egypt was proof positive of the morally base character of Israel's God.⁷

Several variances are worthy of note. Clement's observation that the biblical law proscribes covetousness (Exod 20:17) strengthens Philo's argument that the Jewish people were not motivated by avarice. In paragraph 3, in the second explanation provided, he speaks more in terms of self-protection than retaliation. He says, "protecting themselves by a kind of retributive act against the money-changing Egyptians by carrying off spoil, since they had mistreated the Hebrews by enslaving them." Philo has as his second explanation, "they were retaliating, not on an equal but on a lesser scale, for their enslavement." Philo's justification for the retaliation is the lesser scale (less harm than the original harm done, or *a tooth for an eye*). Clement is perhaps uncomfortable with retaliation as a possible motivation even under these terms. He therefore refashions retaliation into a kind of 'self-protection by retribution' justification.

It is obvious why Clement does not interpret the despoliation as warrant for Christian appropriation of pagan learning here, since it is not found in the Philo text he is following. It is surprising, nonetheless, that he does not exploit the despoliation as a justification for the Christian appropriation of pagan literature and learning elsewhere. Clement would have had reason to be interested in the topic since a primary theme of *Stromateis* Book One is the relationship between philosophy and Christian truth.⁸ We have seen this line of thought in Philo (*Heir* 271–274). Clement knew this particular tractate since he makes reference to it on several occasions.⁹ A possible explanation is that in *Who is the Heir?* Philo is concerned with the relationship of biblical faith to encyclical education specifically. It is with Origen that we have this theme expanded to include philosophy as the 'plunder of Egypt.' Clement perhaps never thought to expand the interpretive purview of the passage to include both the encyclical and philosophy as the 'plunder of Egypt.'¹⁰

⁷ "The Treasures of the Egyptians," 165.

⁸ For Clement, the biblical story of Abraham's intercourse with Hagar (Gen 16) prefigures the union of the faithful with encyclical disciples and in so doing draws upon Philo's *Congr. (Strom.* 1.5.29.10–31.1, see Beatrice, "The Treasures of the Egyptians," 172.

⁹ See index in Van den Hoek, p. 252.

¹⁰ P. Beatrice notes that an echo of Philo's and Clement's argument may be found in Eusebius' commentary on Psalms 104:37–38 (PG 23, 1309B) where it is noted that God

AMBROSE OF MILAN

Ambrose, in *De Abraham* 2.9.63 applies the allegory of the despoliation of Egypt to the soul's relation to the incorporeality of the resurrected body.

And the righteous will so make their exit, that they leave nothing from themselves in this world, in order that their spoils might not reside with the inhabitants and possessors of that land. These even are those who so go up out of that land of Egypt, that the vessels which they took from the Egyptians in exchange, either of gold, he says, or of silver which they made use of for a time, they bear out with them and plunder the Egyptians (Exod. 12:35–36). They took these vessels by the will of God, and they will bear them out with themselves because they are sons of the resurrection, concerning whom it is said, “Not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:18). The Egyptians gave these vessels which were taken from the land of affliction; and some were of gold, others of silver, since every creature of God is good, and especially man who is most excellent in the earth whom God honored so that he breathed in his face the spirit of life, and put him in charge of all the animals. These are those vessels concerning which the Apostle spoke, “We have a treasure in earthenware vessels” (II Cor. 4:7). These things are the garments by which our soul is clothed, so that it goes away from this place richer, and is liberated from that which caused it suffering here.¹¹

Ambrose's hermeneutical association between the resurrection of the body and the despoliation of Egypt is not at all clear in the above passage. Yet this interpretive crux is illuminated in the one other passage in Ambrose which describes the despoliation of Egypt: *Expositio Psalmi* 118.21.12. There he sees in the despoliation of Egypt a precursor to the spiritual benefits Christians have plundered from Jews: the resurrection, justice, virtue and knowledge. These flow from the word of God and are the ‘gold of the mind.’ In this context, the despoliation of Egypt functions as a model for the Christian appropriation of Jewish texts; namely the Old Testament. Folliet writes of Ambrose's perspective in

“gave the Israelites the order to despoil the Egyptians as is usual with people ‘vanquished by war’ and to collect from them the ‘salary’ (μισθόν) for their long slave labour” (“The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 163). There are later echoes in Isidore of Pelusium (PG 78, 308–9 and PG 78, 1148–9) and Procopius of Gaza's commentary on the book of Exodus which comes straight from Philo. For the Latin text, see PG 87/1, 559. The Greek text is found in Cohn and Wendland's *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, IV, 153 (“The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 165).

¹¹ The translation is my own with some corrections provided by A. Kamesar.

both these passages: “Ambroise († 397) interprète la *spoliatio Aegyptiorum* comme un droit d’héritage pour les chrétiens sur les biens spirituels qu’avaient reçus les Juifs, conformément au plan prévu par Dieu et à son vouloir.”¹²

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

In Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Oratio in S. Pascha* 45:20, we find the literal ‘just wage’ and an allegorical interpretation buttressing an exhortation that his audience should take all that is owed to them from the non-Christian world without apology as their proper wage. Interestingly, his message assumes that the readers understand the allegory; there is no attempt to justify or explain the allegory.

What do you say? Was it thus decided that when you made your exit out of Egypt, that iron furnace, you were to abandon there its riches and be loaded up under the direction of Moses and by his legislation and office? I’m proposing something that is not my own yet it is very much my own provided you see things spiritually. You need to borrow gold and silver vessels of Egypt and leave with them. Furnish what you need for the journey with what belongs to others, or rather, with what belongs to yourself. This is owed to you, compensation for the slavery and bricks. Be clever about making this demand. Defraud the right way! Let this be the case for you who has suffered harsh labor there, struggled in the mire, in the miserable and filthy body, all the while building cities and dangerous places which belong to others whose memory perishes with a bang. Why should this be? Should you go out beggarly and unpaid? Why? Will you abandon resource to the Egyptians and their enemies which they acquired wickedly and will consume to worse ends? It isn’t theirs! They plundered it, they seized it from the one who said, “Silver is mine and so is the gold” (Haggai 2:9) and “I will give it to whomever I wish” (Dan 4:14–Eng. 4:17). Yesterday it was theirs for so it was permitted. Today the Lord takes it and gives it to you who are using it well and with a view toward salvation. We should acquire for ourselves friends from unrighteous mammon, in order that whenever we are in need, we might receive back at the time of judgment (Luke 16:9).¹³

¹² Folliet, “La Spoliatio, 10. For Latin text, *De Abraham* (ed. Karl Schenkl, CSEL 32, Vienna, 1896), 616–17. Also *Expositio Psalmi* (ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL 62, Vienna, 1913), 480. Folliet (p. 8–9) also lists Hilary of Poitiers’ *Tractatus super Psalmos* (In Ps. LI,6) as a reference to the despoliation of Egypt. This reference is so allusive and tangential as to lack value for this study.

¹³ The translation, with some corrections, is my own. Also to be mentioned is Basil’s contention that the deception of the Hebrew should be considered “fine cunning” (καλῆ

The ultimate apology for Gregory comes in the claim that what one takes from Egypt was already taken by them unjustly from God's own resources and used improperly. Gregory bases his allegorical appeal (plunder the knowledge of the Greeks) on two assumed literal justifications: 'just wages' and 'treasures taken unjustly are now put to better use.' These literal justifications which had become a part of the putative interpretive tradition have been transformed here into spiritual exhortation for the Christian congregation. Since this is not an apologetic but homiletic work, Gregory's focus (like Origen's) was not upon justifying God but exhorting the flock. The biblical texts of Haggai and Daniel are called upon to buttress his case that all gold and silver ultimately belongs to God; the Egyptians took it unjustly and God now gives it to whom he wishes (the Church). Gregory seems to have followed Origen here; both exhort the reader to plunder the wealth of Egypt using an allegorical interpretation based on literal 'fair wage' and 'earthly mammon put to better usage' justifications.¹⁴ We have also encountered in preaching of the presbyter in Irenaeus the connection between the spoils of Egypt and the 'mammon of iniquity' of Luke 16.

GREGORY OF NYSSA

Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses* († 394) is generally believed to be the most thorough and developed presentation of his spiritual teachings. At many points in his interpretation of the life of Moses, his allegory seeks to define the relationship between secular learning and Christian theology. He recommends neither outright repudiation nor complete accommodation. He proposes a posture whereby profane learning has a critical but subordinated status. This applies to one's pursuit of virtue; this cannot succeed in isolation from the culture in which one lives.¹⁵ In his discussion of the despoliation of Egypt, he claims that the appeal to allegory is the only true solution to the moral problem presented by the despoliation story. All attempts to answer the problem on the literal

ἡ πᾶνουργία) because by it they obtained both their unpaid salary for their years of slavery and the items needed to fit the tabernacle (*Hom. In principium proverbiorum* 12 [PG 31, 412 A1–4]). See Beatrice, "The Treasures of Egypt," 173.

¹⁴ Beatrice is of the opinion that Gregory of Nazianzus has not followed Origen here ("The Treasures of the Egyptians," 173).

¹⁵ P. O'Connell, *The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, *GOTR* 28.4 (1983): 304.

level are unsuccessful in his opinion, even though he recognizes many attempts have been made to interpret literally to justify the story.

112. Thus Moses led the people out of Egypt, and everyone who follows in the steps of Moses in this way sets free from the Egyptian tyrant all those guided by his word. Those who follow the leader to virtue must, I think, not lack the wealth of Egypt or be deprived of the treasures of the foreigners, but having acquired all the property of their enemies, must have it for their own use. This is exactly what Moses then commanded the people to do.

113. No one who has listened to this carelessly would accept advice of the lawgiver if he enjoined those in want to rob and so became a leader in their wrongdoing. If someone looks to the laws which follow, which from the beginning to end forbid wrongdoing to one's neighbor, he could not truthfully say that the lawgiver commanded these things, even though to some it seems reasonable that the Israelites should have exacted the wages for their work from the Egyptians by this device.

114. Yet there is no less ground for complaint; this justification does not purify such a command of falsehood and fraud, for the person who borrows something and does not repay the lender is deceitful. If he borrows something not belonging to him, he does wrong because he commits fraud. But even if he should take what is rightly his own he is still correctly called a deceiver since he misleads the lender into hoping that he will be repaid.

115. The loftier meaning is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone to "borrow from the wealthy Egyptians to receive" such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.

116. Those who treasured up for themselves such wealth handed it over to Moses as he was working on the tent of mystery, each one making his personal contribution to the construction of the holy places. It is possible to see this happening even now. For many bring to the Church of God their profane learning as a kind of gift: Such a man was the great Basil, who acquired the Egyptian wealth in every respect during his youth, and dedicated this wealth to God for the adornment of the Church, the true tabernacle.¹⁶

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 80–1. For Greek text see Grégoire de Nysse, *Contemplation sur la vie de Moïse* (tr. J. Daniélou, 3rd edition, SC 1 (Paris, 2000), 173f. For further discussion of this passage, see the chapter on Augustine. Translated by A. Malherbe and E. Ferguson in *Gregory of Nyssa. The Life of Moses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

The allegorical interpretation of the passage is its only meaning; the literal one has been thoroughly rejected. In par. 112, Gregory claims that Moses actually commanded the reader to plunder Egypt's riches allegorically and that the text has no literal justification at all. In par. 113 he notes the impossibility of Moses being a leader in wrongdoing since his law consistently forbade wronging one's neighbors. In par. 114 he specifically rejects all attempts to justify the story on the literal plane of interpretation; at best Moses was being misleading since he allowed those who loaned the treasures to hope for their return. Interestingly, Gregory still draws upon the haggadah concerning the usage of the plundered treasures for the construction of the tabernacle in par. 115–116, again with the tabernacle referring to the Christian worship of God beautified by the riches of reason. As Giljon writes of Gregory's interpretation, "he explains the spoiling symbolically: those who live according to virtue should use the richness of pagan education in order to beautify the divine sanctuary of mystery."¹⁷

G. Robbins describes Gregory's biblical interpretation as vacillating between the criticisms of the anti-Origenists within the Church and the pagan anti-Moses traditions from without. Gregory's penchant for allegorical hermeneutics has been kept at bay by the increasing anti-Origenism within the Church. Due to this anti-Origen pressure, Gregory's interpretive method could never stray too far from the literal meaning of the text, and when it did, it had to be clearly justified. On the other hand, he wanted to demonstrate that Moses was worthy of emulation and to "reclaim him for the Church from the hands of its cultured despisers."¹⁸

Robbins specifically uses Gregory's allegory of the despoliation of Egypt as a case in point. Philo describes Moses as condoning the plundering of Egypt, arguing on the literal meaning of the text that the Hebrews received a bare wage and retaliated not on an equal but on a lesser scale. Gregory cannot abide by this literal explanation and calls the reader to seek a higher meaning to deflect the scorn the literal reading might attract. Yet this is no flight into hermeneutical speculation, for now Gregory must explain how moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, etc. can be properly used within the

¹⁷ Albert C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis* (Providence, Brown Judaic Studies, 2002) 115. See also P. Beatrice, "Treasures of Egypt," 174–176.

¹⁸ G. Robbins, "Exegetical Restraint in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis*" in *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers* (Chico: Scholar's Press, 1982), 401 and 405.

Christian pursuit of the virtuous life. Of these things he says, “these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.” Pagan learning must be put to use for the edification of the faithful.¹⁹ I disagree with Robbin’s assessment of Gregory’s argument in that there is no indication that Gregory makes any literalist justification for the plundering at all! He rejects all literal interpretations as being futile.

In this passage, similarly to the Stoic interpreters of Homer, Gregory claims that the allegorical justification for the passage is the only sure way to heal the moral problem it entails. He clearly disagrees with the interpretive agenda of Philo, Tertullian, Irenaeus and Augustine (at least his literal explanation in question 53 of *Eighty-Three Different Questions*) for whom the literal justification of the biblical story held out great promise. His interpretation is most similar to that of Origen; neither sought to justify the story through a literal interpretation of it. However their reasons for not interpreting literally differ. Origen seems to be comfortable with the biblical story as is—especially with the haggadic additions to it. Implicit in his argument (2 in *Letter to Gregory*) is a ‘fair wage’ and ‘application of worldly to better purposes’ kind of justification. The least that can be said is that Origen doesn’t appear to be troubled by the story and does not indicate any therapeutic purpose to his allegory. While Origen’s allegory *only* seeks to justify Christian usage of pagan learning, Gregory’s seeks to justify *both* the biblical story itself and the Christian participation in non-Christian learning.

Who is being rejected by Gregory’s anonymous reference to those who unconvincingly try to justify the problem literally? Runia has suggested that the reference surely points to Philo while Winston and Geljon suggest he refers to the broader Jewish-Christian tradition.²⁰ Beatrice suggests that Gregory’s remark is directed at other Christian writers not so far removed, even perhaps Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and the Antiochene interpreters.²¹ While it is clear that Gregory of Nyssa would disagree with Basil’s “fine cunning” argument (see footnote 10 above), Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘allegory only’ position not as out-of-sync with Gregory of Nazianzus’ understanding as Beatrice

¹⁹ Ibid., 406.

²⁰ *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 258; David Winston, “Philo’s *Nachleben* in Judaism,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 6 (1994) 103–110; and Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis*, 77 and 114.

²¹ “The Treasures of the Egyptians,” 175.

indicates.²² As we noted, Gregory of Nazianzus' Paschal sermon employs a 'just wage' traditional interpretation not specifically to justify God but to, based on the allegory, exhort his readers to plunder the intellectual wealth of their culture. His sermon exhorts the hearer to take all that is owed to them from the non-Christian world without apology as their proper wage, but of course, by this he means the intellectual wealth of Egypt. Gregory of Nazianzus does *not* seek primarily to justify the biblical text literally, and it is only this literal justification that Gregory of Nyssa finds so unconvincing. And both of them draw on the argument of Origen.²³

We can also contrast Gregory of Nyssa with Augustine. We noted above that Augustine seems to be quite comfortable with the moral tone of the biblical story and with the notion that God could—especially in the Old Testament dispensation—avail himself of unjust measures in bringing about divine punishment. In question 53 of *Div. quest. LXXXIII* he argues essentially that the deception was justified under the principle that souls are taught by methods that accord with their level of maturity. Thus, Augustine's allegory in *Doctr. chr.* 2.40.60–61 does not seek to solve the moral problem of the text, but to provide justification for the Christian exploitation of pagan literature, philosophy and culture. What we have here is a difference of perspective concerning the intractability of the moral problem of the biblical narrative by means of literal exegesis; Gregory considered the difficulty intractable while Augustine (and most likely Origen) considered the matter solvable without recourse to allegory. Their allegory did not seek to justify the text *qua* text but only to function as allegory; that is, to justify Christian participation in non-Christian learning and culture. For Gregory, the only adequate strategy was to interpret the text allegorically both in order to exonerate God's and Moses' role in the biblical narrative and to encourage Christian participation in non-Christian learning and education.

²² Ibid., 173.

²³ P. Beatrice believes that only Gregory of Nyssa follows Origen ("The Treasures of the Egyptians," 173). I believe I have shown that Gregory of Nazianzus also has followed Origen.

EPHREM AND THEODORET

Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus* displays little interest in the *spoliatio* motif, and makes almost no comment on most of the passages dealing with it. However, on Exod 3:19–22, he states laconically, “By doing this, my (God’s) promise to Abraham will be fulfilled. But [the Hebrews], on account of all the treasures they will seize as they are leaving, will never again be able to look at the faces of the Egyptians.”²⁴ Here, while the plunder of Egypt was necessitated by God’s promise to Abraham, it still left the Hebrews feeling ashamed. But remarkably there is little attempt to justify the despoliation in Ephrem, and even something of a confession of the problems it presents.

A possible explanation of Ephrem’s utterly unique and startling remark is that it represents his sense of ironic humor which T. Koonan-makkai has described as follows. “He [Ephrem] is fond of explaining theological topics in an amusing manner; with an element of unexpectedness he combines amusement, delight, surprise, ridicule, liveliness, sarcasm, irony, satire, cutting remarks, sharp criticism, taunting and provoking reproaches, challenging scorn, and so forth. He relishes his arguments and invites his audience and readers to enjoy a smile or even a laugh.”²⁵ Ephrem here seems to chuckle at the irony the text; while the despoliation fulfilled the promises of God, it was so lavish and morally questionable as to leave the Hebrew people feeling embarrassed and even ashamed.

Others Syrian exegetes drew on the literalist justification of the “fair wages” theory, and thus may be recipients of Gregory of Nyssa’s displeasure.²⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhus provides the clearest example.

²⁴ E.G. Mathews and J.P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Words. Commentary on Exodus*, Section III 4, FC 91 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994) 233. Beatrice (“Treasures of the Egyptians,” 175) treats Ephrem here as an example of a “fair wage” interpretation, which does not seem to be the case, at least in the Mathews/Amar translation. For more on Ephrem, see E.G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentaries on Exodus-Deuteronomy attributed to Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO 588; Arm 26 (Leuven, 2001) 23ff.; as cited by Beatrice (“Treasures of the Egyptians,” 175).

²⁵ T. Koonanmakkai, “Ephrem’s Theology of Humour,” *SP* 41 (2006): 51–56.

²⁶ For instance, Eusebius of Emesa as in V. Hovhannessian, *Eusèbe d’Émèse, I, Commentaire de l’Octateuque*, Bibliothèque de l’Académie Arménienne de Saint Lazare (Venice, 1980) 104 and 222–6; as cited by Beatrice (“Treasures of Egyptians,” 175). Later Antiochene and Nestorian commentators favored the literal “just wage” explanation, as is indicated by the so-called commentaries of Biyarbakir and Isho’dad of Merw. For Diyarbakir, L. van Rompay, *Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, CSCO 484; Syr 206 (Leuven, 1986) 179. For Isho’dad, C. van den Eynde,

καὶ ἐσκύλευσαν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους τῆς βιαίας ἐργασίας δίκαιον ἀπαιτοῦντες μισθόν.²⁷

and they plundered the Egyptians demanding a just payment for their cruel labors.

In *Quaestiones in Exodum* we read (Question 23),

Αἰτιῶνταί τινες τὸ προστεταχέναι τὸν Θεὸν τοῖς ἑβραίοις αἰτῆσαι τοὺς αἰγυπτίους σκευὴ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ ἐσθῆτα καὶ σκευεῦσαι τοὺς αἰγυπτίους· οὕτω γὰρ ὁ Σύμμαχος τὸ «σκευάσασθαι» ἡρμήνευσεν.

Πολὺν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ χρόνον ὑπέμεινεν ὁ λαὸς πλινθουργῶν καὶ τειχοποιῶν καὶ πόλεις οἰκοδομῶν. ἡβουλήθη τοίνυν μισθὸν αὐτοὺς τῶν πόνων λαβεῖν ὁ δεσπότης Θεός. διὸ δὴ καὶ ταῦτα δρᾶσαι προσέταξε. καὶ μηδεὶς ἄδικον νομίζτω, τοῦ Φαραῶ τὸν λαὸν ἡδικηκότος, τοὺς αἰγυπτίους τὸν μισθὸν εἰσπραχθῆναι. ἐκοινωνοῦν γὰρ κάκεῖνοι τῆς ἀδικίας μιμούμενοι τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ὁμότητα.²⁸

Certain persons bring accusation against God for having ordered the Hebrews to ask the Egyptians for their golden and silver vessels and clothing, and to plunder the Egyptians. For this reason, Symmachus translates (to plunder) “to equip.”

The people remained a long time in Egypt making bricks, building walls and constructing cities. Therefore the Lord God decided to give them a reward for their labors. For this reason he commanded them to do these things. So no one should consider it unjust for the people of the most unjust Pharaoh, the Egyptians, to pay a wage. For those people were partners in crime in imitating the cruelty of the king.

This is a straightforward presentation of the ‘fair wage’ argument with the emphasis placed on the wickedness of the Egyptian people who actually lost their treasures. Theodoret realizes that part of the moral problem is that the Egyptian people suffered for the hard-heartedness of Pharaoh. By emphasizing that all the Egyptians were partners with Pharaoh in the cruelties suffered by Israel, he makes the punishment fit the crime for the criminals.

Commentaire d’Iso‘dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament, II, Exode-Deutéronome, CSCO 179; Syr 81 (Louvain, 1958) 14; as cited by Beatrice (“Treasures of the Egyptians,” 175).

²⁷ *In Ezechielem* V, on Ezekiel 16:13 (PG 81, 937 B8–9).

²⁸ *Quaestiones in Exodum* (PG 80, 249). See also Question 23 in the critical edition of F. Marcos and A. Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoretī Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (Madrid: Textos Y Estudios, 1979) 117.

CONCLUSIONS AND RAMIFICATIONS

We conclude our study by examining the interpretive tradition broadly; what general trends are evident and what is the broad purpose of these interpretive traditions? We will also consider the cultural ramifications of the allegorical interpretation; how effective was it and what cultural influence did it leave in its wake? Lastly, we will consider the continuing significance of the allegory; does it bear modern significance for the Christ/culture question?

THE INTERPRETATIONS AND THEIR EFFECT

The story of the development of the despoliation traditions is one of increasing complexity, heightened sophistication and developing allegory. The increasing level of sophistication reflects a concomitant increase in biblical knowledge on the part of intellectual pagan or heretical antagonists. With the translation of the Septuagint, our first exegetical source, we encounter absolutely no awareness of a need to seek justification for the biblical story as it was translated. In fact, it seems to highlight the deceptive nature of the despoliation as if to revel in the glory of deceiving Pharaoh and his feckless people. The earliest attempts to justify the biblical story range from the simplicity of Jubilee's insistence on the appropriateness of divine wrath to Artapanus' blaming it on the Arabians to Ps-Solomon's claim of the appropriateness of despoliation as a just wage to Ezekiel's limiting events to involve only women and Josephus' *bon voyage* gifts. These responses were, for the most part, aimed either at allaying the uneasiness of those within the fold of faith (Jubilees) or at combating the ubiquitous slander of Jews as temple-robbers (Josephus). For those within the fold of faith, these answers might be sufficient. Their antagonists, at least early in the interpretive history, could not answer in great detail because of the insufficiency of their knowledge concerning the biblical story itself.

With Philo we encounter dual tendencies. On the literal plane, Philo tightens up the "fair wage" argument by insisting on the unfair and immoral enslavement of the Jews. Philo is also unique in his transformation of the historical freedom of Abraham's descendants when they moved to Egypt, into a philosophical freedom of the well-born. He is

also unique in his implicit use of the Stoic categories of *katorthōma* and *kathēkon* to justify the despoliation. On the allegorical plane, Philo seeks to use this biblical episode as a means of providing a justification for the accommodation of Greek learning. Philo appears to have asked himself how he could turn this circumstance (Jewish boys educated in Greek schools) to Jewish advantage. Jews, he insists, should utilize the encyclics in their strivings toward divine knowledge instead of exploiting the acquisition of Greek culture simply to further their social and political ambitions. So for Philo, the events of the biblical narrative are above reproach as they stand (literally) yet indicative of a new more liberal attitude to take toward the broader culture (allegorically).

Yet in all the above sources (except for Philo), the arguments depend upon a certain ignorance of the biblical story itself. For instance, if the reader knows that the biblical text explicitly calls the despoliation a “plundering” of Egypt, how can the reader be convinced this should be considered a “fair wage” or *bon voyage* gifts? Wages are fundamentally different from plunder and gifts. Wages involve no deception. These features of the story were passed over lightly by Jewish exegetes in the attempt to convince the faithful and outsiders that their designation as “temple robbers” and “socially malevolent” was unfair and unsubstantiated. Only in Philo’s case do we see an argument that fully takes into account the biblical narrative (the Israelites were unjustly enslaved and thus were due back-wages). As the tradition continues in the Patristic literature, these fairly complex features of the argument develop on the literal plane to counter the increasing biblical knowledge—and thus increasing sophistication—of the arguments posed by the pagan and heretical antagonists of Christianity.

In the rabbinic literature, there is no complete re-written version of the story that could be used as a full explanation and justification of events geared for the biblically ignorant. The fact that the preponderance of the arguments put forth by the Rabbis are directed toward the *beth midrash* leads one to suspect that the moral challenges related to the biblical texts had a real disconcerting effect on the typical rabbinical student. Meeting these challenges was their main concern. These charges were ones that compelled the rabbinic masters to put their creative genius into high gear so as to arrive at spiritually satisfying solutions. Their concern was not so much to win converts or respond to their detractors as to answer the questions that would arise in the *beth midrash*. The Rabbis provided their students with a collection of interpretive possibilities but no cohesive solution. As is typically the

case in rabbinic literature, many of the answers they provided were mutually exclusive and internally contradictory; that is, one Rabbi's solution is completely inconsistent with the solution of another Rabbi. They provide isolated and independent interpretive solutions. However, by providing these clusters of interpretive possibilities, it is perhaps expected that those who are in direct contact with Jewish detractors, whether general anti-Semites or Gnostics specifically, choose and weave together several options into a new whole.

THE ALLEGORY AND ITS IMPACT

Christian interpretation continues the justification themes that we have seen above; both Irenaeus and Tertullian tighten up the "fair wage" interpretation. But what is by far the most important in terms of the intellectual history of the West is the allegorical interpretation which sees the despoliation of Egypt as a metaphor for the Christian appropriation of non-Christian thought and culture. Here, the influence of Philo, mediated through Origen, is prominent. Even after Christianity was firmly in place as the leading religion of the empire, Christians found themselves in a dilemma. On one hand, pagan literature was often polytheistic (the poets) and downright immoral. Roman rhetoric encouraged glibness and was often inconsistent with common piety. Even philosophers, who were the sometime allies of the faithful, under the best of circumstances posed as much challenge to Christian piety as edification. Yet to completely reject the classical heritage was too great a price to pay for faith. Poetry could be allegorized, rhetoric could assist in preaching and persuasion, and philosophy had obvious value for the theologian. "In general it was recognized that pagan literature could be plundered with profit provided that due caution was observed and the end justified the means."¹ Beginning with Philo's allegory of Gen 15:14, this accommodationist and liberal posture was adopted in the east by Origen and in the west by Augustine and provided a significant justification for those who wished to have the best of both worlds. The old Greco-Roman system of education continued primarily because there was no viable Christian alternative until the monastic schools

¹ L. Renolds and N. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3rd edition, 1991), 38.

replaced it with a system of education which was specifically Christian in direction and purpose.

If the more isolated non-accommodationist posture of many clergy had been adopted, as the new religion became universal, it might have imposed a ban on classical pagan texts. Such a censorship, if it had persisted, would have doomed present day classical studies. It is a fact that virtually all texts we have from the classical period were written by Christian hands, or at least, written during the period in which Christianity was the universal religion. The loss of most texts of the classical world stems from the fact that most Christians were not interested in reading them. That some classical texts remain is due largely to the fact that Christian schools and students and academics wanted to plunder them for Christian learning. Taken over from Stoic grammarians, allegorical interpretation transformed offensive passages of poetry into materials for edification. Preachers honed their skills to proclaim the gospel with training in rhetoric. If it were not for this attitude of accommodation, reflected and justified in our allegory, and if the opposing position had been allowed to prevail, countless extant texts would have been lost due to lack of interest.²

There has been, in spite of statements to the contrary, no comprehensive ban in the history of the Church on the reading of non-Christian texts. Church fathers of the highest repute happily encouraged the reading of pagan texts as an adjunct to theology and biblical interpretation. Appollinaris (c. 310–90), with the aid of his father, briefly attempted to develop a complete Christian curriculum by writing a Homeric-style poem about the antiquity of the Jews and a hexameter version of the Psalms. But this was a response to Julian's persecution of Christians in 362 which banned Christians teachers from public schools. As soon as the ban was lifted and persecution ended, Christians and pagans went back to studying pagan texts side-by-side. Julian's proscription against Christian teachers in the academies was necessary because many leading rhetors and philosophers were Christians. Prohaeresius in fourth-century Athens was admired by his pagan student Eunapius. Procopius and Choricus, leading figures in Gaza two centuries later, studied classical and Christian texts together. Clearly the influence of the allegory of Origen and Augustine played no small role in this matter. Other metaphors for Christian appropriation were also used (primarily that of the

² Ibid., 42.

beautiful captured non-Israelite woman based on Deut. 21:10–14—see Origen's *Homily on Leviticus* 7:6). Yet the metaphor of the plundering of Egypt played a leading role right through the middle ages for the legitimate exploitation of the liberal arts, science and philosophy applied beneficially to theology and scriptural interpretation.³

THE INTERPRETATION AND ITS CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE

The continuing power of the story has recently been illustrated by the fact that a prominent Egyptian legal scholar, Nabil Hilmy, dean of the faculty of law at Egypt's Zagazig University prepared to file a suit against all Jews worldwide for reparations for gold stolen during the exodus from Egypt. Hilmy claims that if the story of the Exodus is to be believed, Jews fleeing Egypt "stole from the Pharaonic Egyptians gold, jewelry, cooking utensils, silver ornaments, clothing, and more, leaving Egypt in the middle of the night with all this wealth, which today is priceless."⁴ While this may be rightly considered little more than a legal stunt, it shows the continuing power of the story and the emotions it evokes in the political/cultural tensions between the Jewish and Arab worlds. It also illustrates perhaps something of the anti-Jewish slander which the exegesis we have considered sought to address.

The allegorical interpretation of the story continues to inform Christian theology especially in terms of the Christ/Culture question. This has been spelled out most famously by H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic text *Christ and Culture*.⁵ The *spoliatio* motif is compared to Niebuhr's fourth paradigm in which grace restores nature. Culture must be converted and reformed in order that it may serve a new purpose. "All the riches of classical antiquity, notably Roman literature and law, are not rejected by him (Augustine), nor are they put in a place of hierarchical subordination, nor are they simply accepted without qualification, but instead they are drawn into a great project of Christianization."⁶

³ Folliet, "La Spoliatio" 47. See also L. Frizzell, "Spoils from Egypt" 383–391.

⁴ See "Egyptian Plans to Sue Jews over Exodus Gold" *Religion News Blog*, August 29, 2003 (<http://www.religionnewsblog.com/news.php?p=4183&c=1>). My thanks to David Tapp for bringing this article to my attention.

⁵ New York: Harper and Row, 1951.

⁶ A. Wolters, "Christianity and the Classics: A Typology of Attitudes," in *Hellenization Revisited* (ed. W. Helleman, Missoula: University Press of America, 1994), 199.

This “grace restoring nature” remains a paradigm for contemporary Christian attitudes toward non-Christian sources of knowledge.

Albert Outler identifies “Plundering the Egyptians” as a fundamental value in United Methodist theology which originates in the founder of the church, John Wesley. Wesley quoted regularly from the classics although these quotations were rarely exact or identified. Outler and his staff identified 27 quotations in Wesley’s works from Horace, 19 from Virgil, 10 from Ovid, 9 from Cicero and 7 from Juvenal. Twelve other classical authors are cited (ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Plotinus) sometimes as mere decoration but often in support. “His preaching and teaching offered both the gospel *and* a liberal education, as an integrated experience, to the common people who heard him gladly.”⁷

Wesley was a plunderer of contemporary culture also and, as Outler claims, he was keenly interested in the scientific advancements of his age. These truths, Wesley believed, would reveal, to the eyes of faith, the wisdom of the creator. He was an avid reader of the great popularizers of science of his day and supposes throughout that science not only could be appropriated through faith but that it illuminated the very glory of God. Wesley shows himself as a man who grappled with the problem presented by the secularism of his day. He sought to appreciate the treasures of human culture and to appropriate them to a credible Christian theology that would not forfeit its own integrity. Wesley plundered the Egyptians and challenged his preachers to do likewise. The well-furnished minister, Wesley wrote in his 1756 *An Address to the Clergy*, must, besides his knowledge of scripture (preferably in the original tongues), have a good memory, a competent share of knowledge, a knowledge of history, sciences, metaphysics, natural philosophy, history of Christian thought and devotion, and a knowledge of the world.⁸

Outler challenges his Methodist readers to emulate Wesley’s plundering of Egyptian treasures. He laments the tragedy that in the present United Methodist church the art of “plundering Egypt” (without remaining in Egypt) has been lost and neglected so that we have, on one side, conservatives who preach only the Bible with very little cultural sophistication and on the other hand, liberals who are sophisticated but

⁷ A. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

lacking any resonance with biblical theology and the mind of Christ.⁹ “One thing, therefore, is clear: if anybody proposes to theologize ‘in the Wesleyan spirit,’ he must learn to read and to *love* to read, to remember and to reflect—about all sorts of events and ideas in our human heritage and in our current world—as if he, too, were driven by the compulsions of an inquiring mind as Wesley was.”¹⁰

Paul J. Griffiths argues that, while vast differences between the third millennium and the first exist in terms of the Christian practices used to engage the religiously alien, these differences have not rendered obsolete the metaphor of seeking Egyptian gold. It still can function both metaphorically and as an interpretive icon.¹¹ Metaphors function, in Griffiths’ estimation, in the manner of the icon in the orthodox tradition. Just as the icon is meant to draw the worshipper’s attention, not to itself but to a divine presence the icon evokes, so a metaphor can be gazed upon, not to instruct but to intimate, provoke and suggest.

The metaphor of the despoliation of Egypt intimates two things. First, the gold of the Egyptians is precious and ought to be desired. Sincere Christians are motivated by the metaphor to devour and ingest the religiously alien with all their foreign particulars because it is in these specificities that they find the precious. Just as the followers of Moses needed that which was alien to properly worship their God, so the Christian, both personally and institutionally, must deeply engage that which is alien in order to pursue a satisfying intellectual religious life.¹² The metaphor invokes the need for a deep engagement in alien specificity; that is, the desirability of radical engagement with non-Christian sources. Christians do not read Hindu or Buddhist texts because they have not been engaged sufficiently by this metaphor. Secondly, this metaphor intimates that the gold of the Egyptians is seductive and dangerous. The Fathers (notably Origen) were deeply ambivalent; Egyptian gold is so beautiful that one is tempted to build with it a golden calf for worship. Holding this metaphor as an icon before our eyes reminds the student and worshipper of God that no other goal is permitted than that we enrich our understanding of

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹¹ P. Griffiths, “Seeking Egyptian Gold: A Fundamental Metaphor for the Christian Intellectual Life in a Religiously Diverse Age” (paper delivered at the Lilly Fellows Program Annual National Conference, Valparaiso University, Indiana, October 8, 1999), 3–5. It appears in Valparaiso University’s magazine *The Cresset* 63/7 (2000): 5–16.

¹² Ibid., 14.

scripture in order to better serve the God who has given it. All commentary on non-Christian texts is produced out of love for God and as an act of service to the body of Christ.¹³

G. McDermott has recently written about the motif of the plundering of Egypt in an attempt to encourage a more appreciative and attentive attitude among Evangelical Christians toward world religions. He entitled chapter five which surveys Christian theologians who learned to appropriate and learn from non-Christian thought, "An Old Pattern: Christian Theologians Who Plundered Egypt."¹⁴ Here again we see contemporary Christians looking to the narrative of the despoliation of Egypt as a metaphor for a more appreciative posture by which Christians can read and learn from the texts and teachings of other religions as a source of inspiration and instruction.

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions* (Downer's Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2000), 121.

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